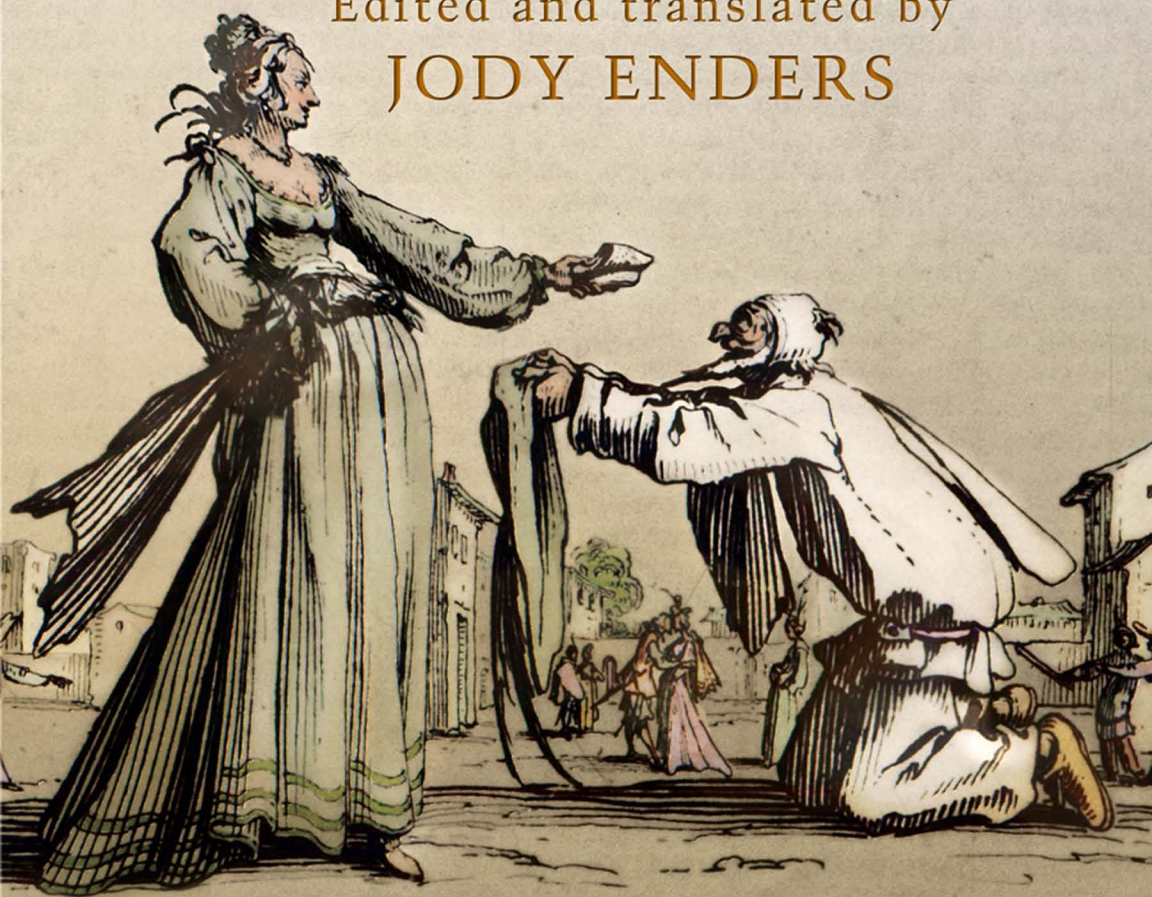


Holy Deadlock

and Further Ribaldries

Another Dozen Medieval French Plays in Modern English

Edited and translated by
JODY ENDERS



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PENN

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For my students. Again.

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On Abbreviations, Short Titles, and Endnotes

Remember that most medieval farces were untitled. On their first or final pages, sometimes we find something on the order of “The Play for Two Characters About the Cobbler and His Wife.” Sometimes, the title looks like the run-on-sentence chapter heading of an eighteenth-century novel and ought really be accompanied by a spoiler alert. Regarding these twelve plays and their players, I refer to all throughout by the English titles and names that I’ve bestowed upon them. Inspired, moreover, by the occasional medieval addition of “better known as,” I too venture alternate titles or subtitles from time to time.

For ease of reading, I favor parenthetical documentation when practical, which works in concert with the Bibliography. To facilitate consultation, I refer to frequently mentioned primary and secondary sources works by the abbreviations below:

<i>ATF</i>	<i>Ancien Théâtre françois</i> . 10 vols. Edited by M. Viollet le Duc.
<i>AWAWL</i>	<i>At Whom Are We Laughing?</i> Edited by Zenia Sacks DaSilva and Gregory M. Pell.
<i>CFSM</i>	<i>Choix de farces, soties et moralités</i> . Edited by Émile Mabille.
<i>DBD</i>	<i>Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends</i> . By Jody Enders.
<i>FCMF</i>	<i>Five Comedies of Medieval France</i> . Translated into English by Oscar Mandel.
<i>FF</i>	<i>“The Farce of the Fart” and Other Ribaldries</i> . Edited and translated by Jody Enders.
<i>FFMA</i>	<i>Farces françaises de la fin du Moyen Âge</i> . 4 vols. Translated into modern French by André Tissier.

<i>HTF</i>	<i>Histoire du théâtre françois depuis son origine jusqu'à présent.</i> By François and Claude Parfaict.
<i>MBA</i>	<i>Murder by Accident.</i> By Jody Enders.
<i>MFP</i>	<i>Medieval French Plays.</i> Translated by Richard Axton and John Stevens.
<i>MTOC</i>	<i>The Medieval Theater of Cruelty.</i> By Jody Enders.
<i>RBM</i>	<i>Recueil du British Museum.</i> Facsimile edition by Halina Lewicka.
<i>RC</i>	<i>Recueil de farces françaises inédites du XV^e siècle.</i> Edited by Gustave Cohen.
<i>Répertoire</i>	<i>Répertoire des farces françaises.</i> By Bernard Faivre.
<i>RF</i>	<i>Recueil de farces (1450–1550).</i> 13 vols. Edited by André Tissier.
<i>RFlorence</i>	<i>Recueil de Florence.</i> Edited by Jelle Koopmans.
<i>RFMSJ</i>	<i>Recueil de farces, moralités et sermons joyeux.</i> Edited by Antoine Le Roux de Lincy and Francisque Michel.
<i>RGS</i>	<i>Recueil Général des Sotties.</i> 3 vols. Edited by Emile Picot.
<i>RLV</i>	<i>Recueil La Vallière.</i> Reprint entitled <i>Manuscrit La Vallière.</i>
<i>ROMD</i>	<i>Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama.</i> By Jody Enders.
<i>RT</i>	<i>Le Recueil Trepperel.</i> Edited by Eugénie Droz and Halina Lewicka.
<i>RTC</i>	<i>Répertoire du théâtre comique en France au Moyen-Âge.</i> By L. Petit de Julleville.
<i>SMFF</i>	<i>Six Medieval French Farces.</i> Translated into English by Thierry Boucquey.
<i>TFFMA</i>	<i>Le Théâtre des farces en France au Moyen Âge.</i> 5 vols. Edited by Michel Rousse.
<i>TFR</i>	<i>Le Théâtre français avant la Renaissance.</i> Edited by Édouard Fournier.

Introduction, Part Deux: Seriously Funny

Why farce? Why comedy at all?

If only in terms of commercial hits at the movies, comedy is much beloved. But not since *Annie Hall* (1977) has it been a winner. Sure, in 2009, the Academy made room for our vulgar propensities by expanding the field of nominees for Best Picture, the better to acknowledge films that were huge box-office draws. There's art; and there's art that people really like.

Medieval and Renaissance French people really liked farce.

Farce was popular culture. It was a forerunner of the sitcom. It anticipated the variety sketches of *Saturday Night Live* and the mockumentaries of *The Daily Show*. It was even a harbinger of the spouse-swapping spectacles of reality TV. And yet, farce remains the black sheep of the theatrical family and the runt of the comic litter. It's the "also-ran." It's the ne'er-do-well flip side of tragedy. It's the long forgotten Side B of that old 45-rpm record, dwarfed by the Top 40 smash of Side A. Flip that record, though, and many a highbrow scholar has been known to flip out upon encountering politically incorrect humor that left no stone unturned. Medieval farce had the stones to engage every hot-button issue in the book even as books themselves were only beginning to enjoy mass dissemination: the inequities of the legal system, the separation of church and state, access to education, gender roles, the very definition of marriage. Joyously and relentlessly, in send-up after hysterical send-up, early satirists shone their harshest spotlight upon the deep instability that underlies any veneer of social stability. They poked, prodded, and palpated the dark underbelly of life. Old age meets youth, holy roller meets nympho, servant meets master, snake-oil salesman meets mark, moron meets PhD, doctor meets patient, foreigner meets local, artisan meets artless, seducer meets prude. And, for the most part, funny meets unfunny as farce rubs everybody's noses in the malodorous fruits of its asinine labors—albeit not as literally as it did in *The Farce of the Fart*—perhaps nowhere more so

than when it takes on an institution that to this day is deemed paramount to the social fabric: marriage.

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century plays, love and marriage did not exactly go together like a horse and carriage.⁶¹ Plus, one of them tends to be sexless. For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for male or for female, things just don't seem to work out. Frustration, fear, anxiety, jealousy, disappointment, and despair are matched only by the eagerness with which everybody sings, dances, and cavorts in the pursuit of deception, trickery, and adultery. What with all those arranged matches of child brides to doddering geezers on one hand and all those vestigial fantasies of courtly love on the other, farce definitely had its hands full. Hands down, it was hands-on. Whence the dozen anonymous plays assembled here, all devoted to the depressingly hilarious—and hilariously depressing—state of holy deadlock.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the quest for the perfect partner has given us everything from eHarmony to sitcoms to the reality TV of the *Bachelor* and the *Bachelorette*. Noble? No. Sacramental? Hardly. A latter-day pilgrimage? Maybe. A quest for fifteen minutes of fame and fortune? You bet. I mean, way back when:

Wasn't it romantic?⁶²

"You've got sheep? I've got looms. Let's get hitched and go into the sweater business" (*or, more realistically*: "Let's get our *kids* hitched and get *them* into the business").

"What's that you say? Lord Moneybags has got a son too? He'll see my looms and raise me 15 hectares of flowering fields and a dairy?"

The marriage negotiation is soon out to pasture and, for the losing party, this is no bargain. But, for farce, it's the deal of the century and the origin of some of its trademark wackiness. Once more into the breach—and into the breeches—says farce, as it storms the palace gates. It's on the scene, ever ready to mock the marital ties that bind with its umpteen representations of marriage unbound. It too was boundless as it overstepped any apparent limits of subject, space, place, or time.

In France, the farcical repertoire comprises some two hundred extant fifteenth-century plays that were reimagined, recirculated, performed, and published throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. All over Europe, farce was in everybody's face as it flew in the face of convention. The medieval face. The Renaissance face. Even the seventeenth-century face of the-atergoers who were eventually to amuse themselves with much more than

Molière. Our final play, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, was published in Rouen in 1600, all making for one very long Middle Ages that defies standard historical periodization.² Put that together with Donald Perret's work on the late sixteenth-century "rediscovery" of the Greek classics, and we are talking about an unparalleled history of comic continuity.

Comedically speaking, this was no renaissance. Farce had never left the building—and that was before it even had a building to leave, such as the first Parisian theater per se, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, erected in 1548. Indeed, no building could be erected to contain it, particularly in regions with strong traditions of civic ceremony. In France, in Italy, in the Low Countries, it spilled into public squares, marketplaces, church steps, impromptu open-air stages, and a host of other sites, public and private, about which we'll never know.³ We do know unequivocally that, much as is the case today—if for very different reasons—farce was preoccupied with rendering unsacrosanct the sanctity of marriage and the family.

The cultural obsession with the scope, status, and legal standing of marriage is scarcely a new phenomenon. In fact, as I was preparing this book, the institution was much in the news with a series of momentous events: the reversal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 2013 (*United States v. Windsor*), the landmark Supreme Court ruling of 2015 legalizing same-sex unions (*Obergefell v. Hodges*), and the (un)civil disobedience of a seemingly obscure Kentucky county clerk who declined to issue newly mandatory, reformulated marriage licenses to gay couples (Kim Davis). As Jacqueline Murray points out regarding the sociocultural politics of medieval marriage, "it is only when we examine the marital complications of the House of Windsor, or when we confront the challenge to conventional marriage posed by same-sex unions that we moderns encounter something of the tensions and urgency that surrounded love, marriage, and family in medieval society" (*Love, Marriage, and Family*, xi). For some, it's a ticking time bomb; for others, it's fabulous timing. But the reality is that, like clockwork, we are called upon to revise our thinking about what it means to be a family in changing times. So too, in the Middle Ages, the times, they were always a-changin',[©] and farce captures that.

Or does it?

In a dazzling study on *The Household and the Making of History*, Mary Hartman reviews the earlier work of demographers and economic historians, which leads her to a number of radical conclusions that are at variance with what many of us first learned about the Middle Ages. True, she

acknowledges, arranged marriages were the norm in “southern and eastern Europe, India, the Middle East, China, and parts of Africa.” In those regions, she explains, “few persons remained single throughout their lifetimes” and couples “typically married early, with brides being seven to ten years younger than grooms,” upon which “newlyweds most often moved into the existing residence of the groom’s parents, carrying on multifamily or joint households of two or more married couples” (6).⁴ Hartman goes on to state, however, that “[y]oung persons in northwestern Europe . . . followed a different path, and for a long time. In England, the Low Countries, much of Scandinavia, northern France, and the German-speaking lands, *most women as well as men from the medieval era on married comparatively late and were much closer in age than their counterparts in early-marriage societies*. A significant number, 10 to 20 percent—and more women than men—never married at all.” She is also explicit that, “from medieval times until the late eighteenth century or so, young persons in their late teens and twenties played the major role in selecting their own partners” (6; my emphasis).⁵ Why is this important?

Because that would mean that the stock characters of farce—those doddering geezers and child brides invoked above—are contrary to historical reality, prompting us to ask: If satire depends on recognition of the object of imitation—even the most postmodern among us can usually agree with Aristotle on that one from *Poetics* 1448a–b—*then what is farce imitating?* If all those marriageable young people were able to exercise some liberty in their choice of a lifelong partner, then why zoom in so indefatigably on the opposite of liberty? Why does so the allegedly lighthearted genre persist in representing so uniformly the stultifying oppression of a conjugal heart of darkness? By the same token, if new feminist historiographies suggest counterintuitively that marriage might not have been as dark and sinister as we have imagined, then why would medieval comic playwrights perpetuate a stereotype that might have evolved and moderated? Why the hysterical anachronism just as times were getting better? Could it have been a question of regional rivalry (North vs. South)? Did the revival of Aristophanes and “the old New Comedy”⁶—come of age more quickly than we thought?

Needless to say, in a volume such as this, I can scarcely do justice to the vast historical scope of marriage. What I *can* do is hint where we’re going with all this, and it’s where marriage inevitably takes us: home.

In Murray’s compendium alone, we hear a chorus and a cacophony of medieval voices on the subject of matrimony, from troubadour to saint, from Jewish merchant to pope, from housewife to cleric. Women and men mar-

ried at all socioeconomic levels: noble aristocrats, working peasants, the working poor, the occasional priest. Marriage was a sacrament, for God's sake—and in an era no less when nascent Protestant sects were increasingly skeptical about the Catholic stronghold on the sacramental. Regardless of religious sensibilities, everybody recognized the matrimonial object of imitation. In the French farcical corpus, we have a distinctly bourgeois perspective on what was going on behind the closed doors of holy wedlock as couples tore asunder what God hath joined together and as theater brought their fights to the public.

Farce is a homebody. It is inordinately fond of the body. And it forms a body of work that, time and time again, declares that social change begins at home with the family and with changing values about love and marriage. It is also distinctly politically incorrect.⁷ But one of the points of this “Introduction” is to show that it cannot be otherwise. Begging your pardon for my split infinitive, its mission is to *politically correct* whatever is wrong. I submit that it is high time to follow it home, so we can hit it where it lives and, in so doing, to let it come home. To get there, we shall take several intertwined routes that are not unlike those navigated in the play whose pilgrimage lends its name to the title of this anthology: #7, *Holy Deadlock*, or, *The Pilgrimage of Marriage*. One route leads us to the nature of farcical verisimilitude, another to the possibility of comic catharsis, yet another to a theory and practice of translation as feminist appropriation (see “About This Translation”). For all roads, this historiographical caveat applies: if historians are to understand what the medieval populace thought and felt about marriage, they must turn not only to official records from the realms of law, politics, or theology (many of which preserve antitheatrical legislation); they must turn also to more unofficial literary records. But here's the rub: if dramatists endlessly ridiculed the institution of marriage, it was mostly upwardly mobile young men doing the talking. Lots of talking.

The marriage farces are bawdy, blasphemous, and bursting at the seams with a frenetic energy that erupts with all the glee of a Broadway musical. Blustering, bellowing, and bristling with pent-up sexual tension, they are somehow exuberant in their depiction of arguments, abuse, anger, assault, and aggression. Catch and release, release and catch; everybody's caught, everybody clamors for an escape valve. Everywhere we look, we are slammed by the imminence, dominance, illusion, or reality of containment, entrapment, suffocation, or imprisonment. The same held true in *Cooch E. Whippet* (FF, 348–49), which opens with a husband locking up his wife inside the marital home in a spatial-

ization of the myth of the chastity belt. And yet, as the walls seem to close in on farce's long-suffering characters, what do we do?

A lot of us do what the medieval spectators did: burst out laughing at all the outbursts. In fact, there is something desperately tragic about farce. So it was that Mark Lawson, a theater critic for *The Guardian*, referred to the assessment of a fellow reviewer who, upon attending *One Man, Two Guvnors*, "feared he might stop breathing because he was laughing so much. It's this sense of helplessness—that laughter is controlling us rather than the other way around—that is the special pleasure of farce, the fear that it may not only be prat-falling actors who need attention from paramedics" ("Farce Is Everywhere"). Lawson also hastened to cite John Caird's *Theatre Craft*, which set forth that "a good farce obliges the audience to believe both in the characters and the events to the point where laughter is their only recourse" (267). To believe in them body and soul is to believe in their souls and their bodies. And, body and soul, the stock characters of farce are on fire, on the verge of physical and emotional explosion at every turn. Explode they did, detonated by the learned legal apprentices and clerks who were, by and large, the authors, actors, and directors of the genre in late medieval France: the Basochiens (*FF*, 4–17).

Accustomed as they were to public speaking, members of the professional society known as the Basoche were first and foremost lawyers in training and masters of the art of rhetoric. With a rapier wit, they turned to theater as a vehicle by which to lampoon the very hegemony to which they longed to belong, letting loose with all their might on social injustice and income inequality.⁸ As far as marriage was concerned, there was way too much at stake for a quiet riot. And were they ever prepared to make some noise about it. It is no coincidence that their society's name is said to have derived from the Greek *basochein*, which denoted loquacity and chatter, to say nothing of histrionics, theatricality, playfulness, and all-around noisemaking (*ROMD*, 130–31). Nor is it happenstance that, even today, the French expression for suing someone is still *chercher des noises à quelqu'un* ("to seek to make noise for someone.") As a merry band of actors and litigators, they were not in the habit of going quietly into that good night. From the minute they banged on the tribunal doors for entry to their legal playing space at the Châtelet, they caused such a ruckus that a formal complaint was lodged against them in 1553.⁹ "Quietly" was not how they did things. And anything was fair fodder, anything was up for grabs: bodies of law, bodies of wisdom, the body politic, and, above all, the politically incorrect human body impolitic.

Bottom line: farce is all about the body, and, *pace* Gail Kern Paster, this was no “body embarrassed.” It was a body in motion and commotion, grotesque in its sneezing, sniffing, coughing, farting, pissing, and shitting. Take it from Cindy Lou in *Husband Swap* (#10) or Penny in *Extreme Husband Makeover* (#11). One need only look, listen, and occasionally sniff in order to come face to face with the output of a corpus replete with leaky vessels.¹⁰ And we’re not talking about a slow drip (although many of the characters are indeed slow drips). Still, for all the seepage, the contents of farcical character are ever under pressure: witness the extensive discussion of how to vent a full head of steam in *Bitches and Pussycats* (#8). With or without the assistance of enemas, farce is utterly desperate for the relief of a cathartic evacuation. It stands on its hind legs, turns downwind, and shows its backside as it moons the public. And it jeers at the noble, purifying purge of pity and fear, which is the soul of tragedy and the technical definition of catharsis. According to a sixteenth-century Latin translation of *Poetics* 1449b, tragedy functions “not through narrating the thing, but through pity and fear expressed by the deeds, in that way purging and relieving all such violent disturbances of the soul (*vehementes animorum perturbationes*).”¹¹ For the Basochiens, “grin and bear it” becomes “bare it and grin.” The promise of a good purge was even part of their marketing plan, as in this piece of advertising for one of their mock trials (*causes grasses*) of as late as 1634:

You will see eloquence in the flesh, stripped to the bone[r], totally naked: alive, male, and virile [*toute nue, en chair et en os, vive, masle et hardie*]. . . . The intention of the litigators is always to stimulate the audience’s laughter, not their empathy [*commisération*]: indeed, *who wouldn’t laugh at the judges alone of this momentous trial, practically pissing themselves trying to hold back their laughter with all their might?* Or at the lawyers who have the honor of litigating there, speaking gravely and seriously of the most ridiculous things in the world?¹²

Grin and bear it; bare it and grin. Some were to bear—and to bare—more than others. If connubial bliss was not in the cards and not in the stars, then the fault couldn’t possibly lie in the Church, could it? Of course not. That would be heresy (which is the main theme, by the way, of my intended next volume). Clearly, the fault had to lie in us. Make that *half of us*. In a culture notoriously prone to scapegoating,¹³ this was no laughing matter but farce laughed out loud anyway, especially at women.

I can offer no better way to sum up the sexism of farcical humor than a witticism attributed to the nineteenth-century American politician and railroad attorney Chauncey Mitchell Depew: “A pessimist is a man who thinks all women are bad. An optimist is a man who hopes they are.” With a profound misogyny that sometimes verges on the protopornographic,¹⁴ medieval male deliberators sat in judgment, indisputably absorbed by containing and disciplining that unremittingly leaky vessel known as the female body—even as they soiled themselves, as in the passage above, while losing it. That is not to say that we won’t meet several male vessels that spew with rage or ooze like crazy: Cindy Lou’s unnamed husband in #10, *Husband Swap*; Calvin, in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*. But, in farce, it is the female characters who bear the brunt of containment as they endure beating after beating. Nor does that stop farce from reversing the polarity by configuring victims as abusers,¹⁵ blasting its women physically and spiritually as the (un)fairer sex. At the same time, the theatrical experience was obviously a blast. For over three centuries, audiences split their sides and turned out in droves to revel in the pleasures of painful spousal brawling (or is that the pains of its pleasure?). It was all in the service of cathartic laughter. Medieval French farce was a literal hit parade, a movable fist. The question is, to what end? Does farce achieve a bona fide comic catharsis? Or, in an end run, does it just purge in its pants?

While comic catharsis is pretty much a given for contemporary theater critics—Mark Lawson’s “Farce Is Everywhere” readily invoked “the cathartic release of laughter” regarding the revival of farce on London’s West End—the term has long been contested for the medieval theater. Thanks, however, to the insights of such scholars as Maria Jacobelli, Noah Guynn, and Carol Symes, it needn’t be. Jacobelli has documented the scandalous eroticism of clerical laughter in *Il Risus paschalis*, and Guynn a complex politics of psychic deliverance (“Translating Catharsis,” 87–95). Elsewhere, in an exquisite essay, Symes returns to a fascinating but little-known manuscript fragment of “what appears to be the (lost) second book of Aristotle’s *Poetics*” known as the *Tractatus Coislinianus* (“Media and Memory”).¹⁶ You heard her right: this is no murder mystery à la Umberto Eco’s *Name of the Rose*, no modernist fantasy that medieval comedy was literally to die for. No way, counters Symes: the *Tractatus* survives only “because it was copied and kept in a monastic library.” Presumably copied in the tenth century based on a sixth-century exemplar, the text is an *epitomē* or digest that establishes that “comedy, like tragedy, was considered to be a dramatic art designed to produce *catharsis*.” The two genres are two sides of the same theatrical coin of the realm, one the

distorted mirror image of the other, both born of the cathartic admixture of pleasure and pain. While tragedy “takes away the soul’s fearful passions through compassion and awe,” comedy is “an imitation of an act laughable and lacking in grandeur’ which ‘through pleasure and laughter accomplishes the purifying of the same passions [as tragedy does].” Moreover, the *Tractatus Coislinianus* begets a bona fide theatrical genealogy: tragedy “has sorrow for a mother” but “comedy has laughter for a mother”¹⁷—to which farce says “yo mama.” So too do Wayne and Beau in #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint* when holding forth on the relative merits of women. They manage to agree only on the virtue of their own mamas. Forget the Virgin Mary—she had miracle plays for *her* playground. Farce sees tragedy’s noble maternity and raises it two motherfuckers. It does not have a poker face. Instead, with a song and dance routine, it purges and purifies any residual animus related to whatever it must get out of its system. This comedic release is catharsis, pure and simple, impure but not simple.

Tragedy is famous for its men who are better than we are (*Poetics*, 1448a–b); comedy is infamous for those who are much worse. Both foundational principles were disseminated by Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), for whom comic writers and actors rendered private things public when they “represented by song and gesture the doings of men in private life” (*comoedi sunt qui privatorum hominum acta dictis aut gestu cantabant*).¹⁸ And both art forms required recognition of the object of imitation; both are larger than life. But, in farce, larger tends to be smaller as the *dramatis personae* get beaten up and beaten down; then they pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and—Wylie Coyote-like—they start all over again. In a handful of plays, they even rise from the dead, parodically Christlike, in one helluva resurrection.¹⁹ It’s just that, if only faith assists believers in suspending their disbelief enough to believe in miracles like walking on water or being raised from the dead,²⁰ no reasonable medieval person would believe that a man could get pregnant. Farce is not populated by reasonable people. That’s why a premise like the knocked-up husband works so well in a play like *Le Galant qui a fait le coup* or, for that matter, in a 2005 episode of *Grey’s Anatomy*.²¹ Indeed, the reader of farce often wonders whether the proverbial reasonable person is but a fiction of American jurisprudence. If anything, serious observers might protest that, as a genre, farce is entirely unreasonable, the bastard child of unreasonable parents. Recall now the umbrage taken by one of the first modern historians of the Basochiens. For Adolphe Fabre, the intellectual emissions of their lawyerly antics had prostituted the theatrical Muse:

There exist certain monstrous couplings that nature finds repugnant, marriages of reason that the imagination cannot conceive. . . . Who among us has not seen pieces of poetry enclosed in a vase . . . pitiful poetry, tortured by a barbarous father like a contorted clown being forced to go through a narrow hoop! We will seek out and ask the clerics, jurists, and even poets of a certain renown, whether or not they have in fact prostituted the muse by delivering her (as it were) to the caresses of the legal process. . . . (Fabre, *Les Clercs du Palais* [1882], 37–38)

Isidore of Seville had said as much: the plots of “writers of comedy . . . represent the defiling of virgins and the love affairs of courtesans” (Barney et al., 369). Theater just couldn’t leave the side of its whores, particularly those prone to the obscenities with which they dramatized its fantastical stories (*fabulae*).²² When Basochial actors later embodied that wantonness, practicing transvestism on the stage, they too unburdened themselves all over women. They’d show ‘em, all right. And a great deal of what they showed ‘em, often violently, is that farcical interpretation is *interpenetration*.

Farcical (il)logic ties itself up in knots. Farce is itself a Gordian knot of sexism, politics, economics, class, and religion that no “unknotting” of any denouement can disentangle. Its sexist eroticism is political, consumerist, socially stratified, and sacrilegious. Its gendered politics are sexist, consumerist, classist, and blasphemous. Its domestic economies are eroticized, politicized, disenfranchised, and theologized. And its theology is sexist, political, classist, and pietistic. Farce peers into public and private spaces, a voyeur at the threshold of marital and extramarital bedrooms, municipal bodies, churches, and marketplaces, all of which conceal as much as they reveal. From behind the curtains, it splits everything wide open to expose the truism that nothing is what it seems: shitty britches are tucked inside sealed butter pots at market (historical reality); an easy mark sticks his head into a mysterious soot-colored box and blows (theatrical fiction).²³ What farce hath joined together let no man or woman tear asunder. Its sexual, pretextual politics were for real. And that, I submit, is the true object of farcical imitation.

When Fabre took a whiff, he disliked the stinky essence; but what farce distills is the crazy, absurd, ridiculous, nonsensical, over-the-top-ness of life. Whereas good old Aristotelian verisimilitude is fine fare for drama overall, farce depends on the realities of exaggeration. Those realities include poverty, neglected children, abused servants, and brutalized wives. In other words, exaggeration is the truest thing that farce does. Its zany behaviors are all too

recognizable and eminently consonant with the very ontology of drama: they are verisimilar. As Caird turns the phrase in *Theatre Craft*, “farce is like comedy on acid. It has to be fast from the very start and must finish fast and furious, but it must be accurate throughout. . . . Farce is a serious business” (267). It was hardly sound and fury signifying nothing.

The highly educated Basochiens were masters of the rhetoric of law and laughter, empowered to do what any good rhetorician does: deploy words and acts to permeate public opinion, public sentiment, and public action. When they incited an audience to behave (or to misbehave) as it ought or ought *not* to, farce was their medium; and their message, staged in fraught domiciles innumerable, was a thoroughly modern one—they pulled out all the stops to demonstrate that it’s the status quo that is unreal. A similar phenomenon obtains for the ubiquitous performance of violence. What seems insufferably unreadable on the page becomes enjoyably hyperreal on the stage. I have seen this happen multiple times in the classroom when students crack up at the enacted sights and sounds of a text that they had found unredeemable in print. By way of analogy, think what it must have been like to calibrate the comic potential of the Three Stooges from the scripts alone. Counterintuitively, when farce is at its most real—played by real bodies in real space in real time—it seems the most unreal. Or should one say that, at its most unreal, farce seems the most real? My point is that, by dint of exaggeration, its looney-tunes events seem all the more convincing—and all the more amusing—because of the verisimilitude of their impossibility.²⁴ But how does farce do it? And do it so well?

The *why* is surely a matter for psychologists; the *how* is a matter for comedians, whose farcical fantastic creates a new vision—a *revision*—of the real, a re-creation that is recreation. In what I can only think to call the genius of the genre, these second dozen farces repeatedly showcase a peculiar capacity to be extremely literal and infinitely metaphorical all at once. They meld the real and the fantastic, the physical and spiritual, the corporeal and the verbal. And they thereby incarnate a debate that would dominate the Reformation, a time when more symbolically minded Protestants came to dispute the more literal-minded Catholics about perhaps the greatest doctrinal issue of the age: What really—as opposed to symbolically—happened during Transubstantiation? Did the Eucharist and the sacramental wine become the literal body and blood of Christ? Or was this metaphor? A more symbolic act?²⁵ Within that broader religious framework, farce incarnates *literal symbolism* and *symbolic literalism* and, if that formulation doesn’t ring

any bells for you, then, behold: in both Figure 6 and #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, a bell maker will do it for you. He will literally melt down the raw material and symbolically forge comedy anew. What has gone far too long unacknowledged is that this uniquely medieval brand of comedy refashions the theory and practice of verisimilitude as farce agitates for social change. If life on the home front is a laugh riot, then laughter need not be a synonym for social inertia. So, take their wives, please.

Yessiree. Centuries before American popular culture betrayed its own engrossment with the “wife swaps” and “extreme makeovers” of reality TV, the farceurs had already figured out how couples might make a spectacle of their amorous selves.²⁶ Be it by swapping wives (#9, *Wife Swap*), swapping husbands (#10, *Husband Swap*), or commissioning makeovers for both sexes (#11, *Extreme Husband Makeover* and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*), farce recommends: swap now or forever hold your peace. True, peace has never been its strong suit. But something else is. Farce is consumed by the comedy of doubling up, doubling down, and doubling over with laughter. In our closing four spouse-swapping plays, it’s always *two* couples who are swapping, *two* sides of the marital coin, *two* interpretations. A more interesting line of inquiry concerns why, in light of all the animated agitation and advocacy, we seem to find so little real change.

At first glance, farce does seem to forsake all other rhetorical calls to action and cleave only unto laughter. Even the great nineteenth-century French theater historian and editor, Louis Petit de Julleville—scarcely a protofeminist—divined that, although farce hosts countless invectives against marriage, it rarely culminates in a recommendation for change (*RTC*, 135). So, at some level, it has been normal to surmise that farce can but reinforce—nay, celebrate—the status quo.²⁷ It has likewise made sense to determine that, in farce, the dramatic illusions that solicit a comic catharsis make audiences feel as though a citizenry’s problems have been resolved (largely violently) when they have not. Thus, Sandra Swart astutely reviewed the work of the social anthropologist, Mary Douglas, when describing the double-edged sword of humor. Albeit in the context of the very different social upheaval in South Africa, she writes that “a joke works as an ‘anti-rite,’ destroying hierarchy and order. . . . [I]t is an expressive, symbolic formation devoid of impact on real world affairs: it does not do anything.” Quite to the contrary, she continues, it “offer[s] not rebellion but only its illusion, while underneath fostering further resignation and acquiescence. . . . Humor can release tension and thus actually maintain the status quo” (“Terrible Laughter,” 899).²⁸

Once upon a time, such a distinguished philosopher of rhetoric as Kenneth Burke averred that laughter is essentially antirhetorical or, at minimum, anti-interventionist: “A good humorist does not want to ‘make us go out and do something about it’” but, rather, to have us feel, “Well, things may not be so bad after all. It all depends on how you look at them.” As Burke put it, “Pure humor is not protestant but acquiescent” (*Philosophy of Literary Form*, 320–21; Bevis, *Comedy*, 81). But, again, as the Catholic sacrament of marriage came under the harsh and growing scrutiny of new sects arguing for symbolism even as they bore the literal moniker of “Protestants,” did audiences merely laugh, cry, protest, or feign offense, only to forget about it? Seriously: Did farce open its big fat mouth only to howl at the moon?

Not bloody likely. Not in an age of reform and Reformation. It was legitimate, of course, for postmedieval scholars to have embraced the critical commonplace that laughter forestalls the empathic response in favor of stasis: in 1634, that’s exactly what the Basochial advertisers of that *cause grasse* said it did. But that has never been the end of the social story. Nor is it sufficient to revert to another piece of conventional wisdom—namely, that authors frequently critique their repressive governments from beneath a protective veil of satire—and call it a day. Let’s say instead that the party’s never over, and we’ll call it a farce.

Vicious though medieval satire can be, it cannot be relegated to a vicious circle. Nor does it follow that laughter voids intervention or performativity in the Austinian sense.²⁹ In acting up and acting out, farce was also a speech act. To view it as anything less is to ignore some of the more compelling adumbrations of medieval satire. That is to say that the antirhetorical assessments just don’t jibe with the farcical calling, as touted by early commentators. For instance, Jean Bouchet (1476–1557), one of the great theorists and practitioners of law, rhetoric, and theater, once announced that the Basochiens aimed “to declare by grave tragedy, rude satire and feigned comedy, the good of the good and the evil of the wicked.”³⁰ Earlier in the thirteenth century, John of Garland had indicated that “the law of satire is to laugh at vice, and to dance about.”³¹ Farce laughs hardest—and best—when it gives the public a real song and dance: more often than not, a musical one. French fairy tales end with *tout finit par des chansons* (“everything ended with songs”): that is how French people say “and they all lived happily ever after.” But farce is no fairy tale; and its protagonists are more than likely to live unhappily ever after. Nevertheless, as it crescendos toward its final flourish, farce *laughs* happily ever after.

As we shall see in the plays of this anthology, the unsubtle farce imparts, with surprising subtlety, an ethical universe that demands ethical reflection—even when such reflection seems very far away from what everybody involved is doing: laughing. In taking humor seriously, medieval farceurs produced an art form that was—and is—*seriously funny*. Louise D’Arcens agrees that humor and laughter are “inherently ethical practices which can have direct and even urgent ramifications for the coherent functioning of the social body” (“Medievalist Laughter,” 118); and, for his own part, Noah Guynn affirms that, under the right circumstances, farces “did not awaken resentments in order to dampen them but rather mediated social tensions without resolving them. In the process, they opened a space for political dialogue, including overt and covert expressions of resistance and dissent” (“Translating Catharsis,” 85). Therefore, rather than posit an energy-draining and purgative cathartic release that empties out its ethics along with its bowels, or that signals acceptance of all the pain and suffering, we might prefer to entertain the possibility that the genre led to a rethinking of social contracts and not simply their reinforcement.

George Orwell once remarked that “every joke is a tiny revolution,” and Swart agrees that “some jokes may have been little revolutions, private challenges to the status quo.”³² What the cathartic laughter of farce cannot *do*, it can perhaps *undo*. Let’s face it: when farce placed threatened and battered women center stage, it might well have reinforced the politics of the medieval oppressor as it theatricalized the pseudoperspective of women; but, with a major axe to grind, it also liked to give it to you straight up as it took you straight down. In the twenty-first century, we would have no trouble at all imagining the following: a given spectator is appalled by peals of laughter at the comic staging of the tragedy of spousal abuse. He or she then resolves—even having joined in the laughter—to do something about it: work for a shelter, run for office, go into public policy. Are we really prepared to assume that medieval people were so very dissimilar? Is it really so improbable that a male spectator delighted in a farcical assault while concurrently deciding to be kinder to his wife? Is there no universe in which, after a good round of cathartic laughter, a battered woman figured out a way to leave her abusive husband (difficult though that might have been)?³³ Or that somebody came to her aid?

Any contemporary performance theorist readily avows that theater is a great societal good and that grass-roots, community-based theater promulgates change for the better. Then again, for all the good intentions expressed ad infinitum by even the most entrenched medieval French town council

authorizing a play, we know disappointingly little from reliable sources about any specific good behavior that theater facilitated. We almost never hear about the *positive* results of theater.³⁴ Naturally, history records the extraordinary deeds that impelled record-keeping in the first place (as when something illegal, immoral, or otherwise noteworthy happened in theater's wake). But was posttheatrical *good* behavior really so ordinary?

I doubt it.

Consider for a moment the highly visible farcical offerings of our own era, which, by and large, have migrated to television. Indeed, another theater critic for *The Guardian*, Alfred Hickling, noted wistfully that, while "it seems that the farcical impulse itself will never be extinguished, it has simply transferred to television. Classic farce as Plautus or Molière might recognise it is still to be found in a particularly perfect episode of *Fawlty Towers* or *Frasier*" ("Ooh-la-la, There Go My Trousers"). Now consider the praise lavished upon American sitcoms like *Will and Grace*, *Ellen*, or *Modern Family* for having participated in dismantling stereotypes of the family. It is no exaggeration to state that comedic entertainments have the power to seduce us, betray us, trick us, or cajole us into believing that a beloved gay character, a cameo by Oprah, or a postheterosexual family can aid and abet the larger sociocultural receptivity to a redefinition of marriage.³⁵ Regardless of whether our fictional friends are responsible for the shift in attitudes toward homosexuality, it is nothing if not tempting to *believe* that they are: to believe that art can change the world. And, though we might no longer hang in there spiritually for the physics of a miracle like walking on water, we'll happily believe in the miracle of social change. And we'll adore the miracle of physics comedy on *The Big Bang Theory*. An intangible optimism breaks through, teasing and tantalizing us with the harebrained notion that comedy can shape and reshape public opinion and move it in new directions.

I suspect that something of the sort was going on in the Middle Ages but that, for a variety of reasons owing to the vagaries of the historical record, we just can't see it. Maybe the good went unseen or unnoticed. Maybe we're not finding the evidence because we're not looking for it. Maybe we're looking for it in the wrong places. Or just maybe we're so busy sitting in judgment about early laughter that we're missing the potential of farce to do a body—and a body politic—some good. In matters of justice and injustice—the bread and butter of domestic comedy—the gregarious farce insists that, if marriage was deadlocked, humor was not. The challenge for the translator is to recapture the myriad benefits of comic catharsis in today's politically correct world.

What has been lost in translation can be found only when we rethink political correctness. Lest there be spoken in jest certain vile truths that can no longer be held to be self-evident, current guidelines for sensitivity in language dominate the discursive scene. Critics, theorists, journalists, and everyday citizens have rightly sought to alter the institutionalized language that has fomented deeply ingrained cultural biases about gender, class, race, color, or creed. These admirable efforts to redress past and present inequalities have done much good by substituting inclusionary for exclusionary discourse. Be that as it may, when postmedieval political correctness is imposed upon medieval literature, it runs several grave risks:

On one hand, politically correct language can place history itself in jeopardy when we apply it categorically. For example, if, when speaking of a Basochien, I were to say “he or she,” that would be historically inaccurate. As far as we know, there *were* no female Basochiens. By the same token, in the “Production Notes” to each play, it is sometimes more expedient—and infinitely more clear—to say “actress” rather than the gender-neutral “actor,” which many modern thespians now favor. For the most part, I too will employ “actor.” But, when I have occasion to explain that a given role will resonate very differently depending on whether a man or a woman is cast, it strikes me as both unwieldy and silly to lucubrate with “female actor.”

On the other hand, the automatic utilization of politically correct language can dangerously drive the good underground with the evil, flattening and obscuring the indeterminacy of medieval laughter. Imagine that I were to eradicate some of the more sexist and classist salvos of farce. That would run the risk of confining hatred and prejudice to the realm of the virtual, denying theater’s capacity to perpetrate performative evil.³⁶ Furthermore, when scholars avoid, misread, dismiss, or preemptively politicize what the apparently single-minded sexism of farcical humor complexifies, they also deny the possibility that some reactive *good* might have come from the theatrical unfunny. One thing is for sure: when push comes to shove—and it customarily does—we have no hope for answers about all the violent, sexualized battery of farce if we refuse to ask what’s so funny.

Medieval laughter need not be any more sinister or unsympathetic than our own. It makes us human, distinguishes us from the beasts.³⁷ Thus spake François Rabelais: *le rire, c’est le propre de l’homme* (“It is laughter that becomes man best” [*Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 2]). Maybe the key here is to laugh not at one *or* the other but at one *and* the other. Maybe laughter is both altruistic *and* morally bankrupt. Or maybe it’s none of the above. Re-

member: farce is roughly contemporaneous with Nicolas of Cusa, who took humanism by storm with his philosophy that “it either is or it is not. It is and it is not. It neither is nor is not.”³⁸ Laughter is not permanently destined to be the standard-bearer for social conservatism. That’s an old husbands’ tale.

When wrapping up her exquisite work on pardon tales, Natalie Zemon Davis meditated on dark humor. Were excuses in order and, if so, whose?

In writing this book, I have often wondered whether I should ask pardon of my long-dead subjects. In retelling their accounts of bloodshed, which may often have left sorrow, terror, and regret in their wake, *I found I was sometimes laughing*. . . . If my readers are like my listeners, they may have laughed as well. What makes them funny? . . . [T]he mixture of laughter and horror was hardly foreign to the sixteenth century. . . . Montaigne wrote of “how we cry and laugh at the same thing”; priests were accused by Calvin of making “pleasant tales” of their penitents’ confessions, and even Friar Benedicti worried about their “taking pleasure in them.” (*Fiction in the Archives*, 114; my emphasis)

Montaigne had nothing on Blotto the Cobbler from *Monk-ey Business*, who also gathered that people could be “[l]aughin’ one minute, cryin’ the next: both at the same time” (*FF*, 290). To laugh until one cries and to cry until one laughs is the quintessence of farcical storytelling.

Is this heartlessness, queries Davis, or schadenfreude? “[P]erhaps,” she answers herself, “there is something deeper here than the listener relishing a story of what happened to someone else. Remember that Benedicti said people were confessing their sins ‘as if they were telling a story.’ *Turning a terrible action into a story is a way to distance oneself from it*, at worst a form of self-deception, at best a way to pardon the self” (*Fiction in the Archives*, 114; my emphasis).

Steeped in deceptions, farce is also a story, as rife with Davis’s “terrible action” as it is with Swart’s “terrible laughter.” It is also terribly ambiguous and indeterminate. Although the alleged safety of Davis’s distance has informed the definition of theater since Aristotle, it is that very distance that, through humor, makes for both an *artistic advantage* and a *historiographical disadvantage*. In the evaluation of comedy, it likewise makes for an *artistic disadvantage* and a *historiographical advantage*. Here is what I mean by that:

In farce, we recognize the theatrical building blocks of social change, which is definitely an *artistic advantage*; but we are usually unable to find

the evidence of any greater art-borne good for the medieval communities in question (*historiographical disadvantage*). Meanwhile, the violence of medieval comedy is not immediately funny today (*artistic disadvantage*)—in part because we already know way too much about the horrors of the era's violence (*historiographical advantage*). Davis wondered whether she should beg her long-dead subjects' pardon. As for *moi*, I seek not to beg your pardon (although, by the last page of this book, I might have to): I want to ask the questions and tell the stories. Translation is a story too, even when what it recaptures is a communication that seems unpardonable in a politically correct world.

Meanings get lost; languages, texts, gestures, and acts become unreadable over time; people forget; audiences, readerships, and witnesses multiply exponentially. We can debate till we're blue in the face (or, for farce, blue somewhere else) what it is all *meant* to do. After all, people are what they do (or so goes the preeminent theory of medieval character). In the end, audiences do with it what they will. As historians interested in seeing their will, we are obliged to see what they do. And one of the best places to watch what they do—and what on earth they think they're doing—is at the theater. The topsyturvy world of farce embodies what people do. Or what they cannot do. Or what they would prefer to undo. Or what they hope to do. In which case, we might inquire: How's that hopey-changey stuff working out for them?

Medieval audiences laughed heartily at horrific materials: alcoholism, servitude, poverty, xenophobia, ageism, repression, deceit, disease, despair, and virtually nonstop violence as husband after husband brutally beats his wife. There is an artistic problem if they don't but a moral problem if they do. They laugh till they hurt and hurt till they laugh. But farce's favorite sexist subjects *should* hurt. It is when they stop hurting that we have a problem not of theory but of practice. And, to hurt, they must speak.

If the past couple of decades are any indication, a clutch of interesting and suggestive studies have helped us, slowly but surely, to *hear* all that medieval laughter: to name but a few, Lisa Perfetti's *Women and Laughter*, Louise D'Arcens's *Comic Medievalism*, Sara Beam's *Laughing Matters*, and such edited collections as Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg's *A Cultural History of Humour*, Albrecht Classen's *Laughter in the Middle Ages*, and Zenia Sacks DaSilva and Gregory Pell's *At Whom Are We Laughing?*. Plus let's not forget Jelle Koopmans's reedition of the fifty-three medieval farces of the *Recueil de Florence* and Nathaniel Dubin's groundbreaking translation of *The Fabliaux*, the fabliau being a narrative version of what farce acts out.³⁹

Although scholars still tend to focus less on farce per se than on other genres and media, and although the Brits generally do a far better job with slapstick across the pond, a bona fide medieval sense of humor is at long last leaking out as it militates on the margins. If we want to see what a vision of medieval social change might have looked like, then we can no longer neglect farce. To deny admission, to refuse to listen, or to sanitize it is to camouflage precisely what most needs to be heard out. Laughter is de rigueur and defies rigidity. By its very nature, farcical advocacy *must be* “politically incorrect.” It cannot be otherwise: the politics of daily life is its target.

In the final analysis, there is no reason whatsoever to exclude the voices of medieval farce from modes of theatrical advocacy for genuine societal change. So how about if we give farce the last laugh? Instead of marrying our fortunes to *being* “politically correct” in our approach to comedy, we might prefer—again, with that split infinitive—to “politically correct.” We might prefer to understand, from the uses and abuses of gallows humor, that the most vile and violent subjects are themselves subject to correction, however fantastical, by the accessible exaggeration of farce. In the immortal words of George Bernard Shaw, “Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh” (*Doctor’s Dilemma*, 109). In these days of hypersensitive pedagogies and thin-lipped humorlessness, there’s a breadth, depth, and pleasure to this early humor that is tremendously liberating. It doesn’t stop us from seeing everything that might be wrong with the objects of satire. But there’s an awful lot that’s right with it. For better, not for worse, farce has the capacity to turn your whole world upside down. I say we let it.

About This Translation

The great advantage of a multivolume project is that the world of medieval French farce has already been introduced in *“The Farce of the Fart” and Other Ribaldries*. Having asked and, I hope, answered many of the questions related to my strategies for translation, I now put some icing on the cake. It’s a wedding cake.

Even more emphatically than before, I call these pieces *adapted translations*. Although I continue to render each and every word of the Middle French, these new translations are both more literal *and* more adapted. In part, this is owing to that ingenious farcical melding of literalism and symbolism (see “Introduction”), in part, to my ongoing wish to avoid philological quibbles with my medievalist colleagues. But mostly, it has to do with my larger goal: to import or hand over (*traduire*) a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century French universe to a contemporary American one. It’s all about getting from medieval to modern culture, mood to mood, feeling to feeling. In a word, I use every resource at my disposal to get from there to here and here to there because—thank you, Dr. Seuss—funny things are everywhere. I keep looking for the touchstones, even as the ground shifts beneath my feet; and I keep finding stand-up comedy, slapstick, vaudeville, Broadway, *Saturday Night Live*, sitcoms, the *Daily Show*, and pop music.

By way of amplifying my earlier *modus operandi* (*FF*, 33–54), I elaborate below on some additional methods to medieval translational madness.

Une Traduction engagée, a Feminist Appropriation

I said just now that this is a wedding cake. It’s also an upside-down cake. Farce wants to turn your frown upside down; I want to turn its *misogyny* upside down. The Basochiens got women wrong top to bottom; I’ll get them right, I hope, by going bottom to top, the better to set the world right side

up again. “Men on top,” says Doc Phil not once but twice in our first play, *The Newlywed Game* (Scene 2). “Women on top,” says Natalie Zemon Davis in an essay by that name that revolutionized the field of medieval and early modern studies. “Feminist translation,” say I, when topping it off with a *traduction engagée*. “*Holy Deadlock*” and *Further Ribaldries* is a feminist project, informed by a translational strategy of appropriation.

Let it be known that I strongly suspect that the male authors and performers of medieval farce would be rolling over in their graves—and not with laughter—if they could see what I’ve done with and *to* their relentless sexism. But theater itself is always a translation; and it is always about the politics of translation. It imagines a move from idea to incarnation, page to stage, thought to motion, sight to sound, image to action. The unseen becomes seeable, the unimaginable imaginable, the unstageable stageable. In that sense, the silence of the theatrical page is a space of boundless artistic creativity. It invites contemporary investments in its virtuality and, more intriguing still: the translator becomes a virtual dramaturge and, at times, even a virtual director. It is eminently fitting that reimagination and reappropriation infuse the translator’s own funny business,¹ a very serious business nonetheless of serious historiography and serious editorial practice.

It’s true: the blistering farces of medieval French domestic life were authored by men; but that doesn’t stop them from capturing a compelling vision of female subversion and subversiveness. In the “Introduction,” I mentioned the perspicacious Mary Hartman, whose “subversive” history now draws a veritable road map—takes us on a bona fide pilgrimage—to the lives of real medieval women. When it comes to hearing their voices and seeing their long-lost acts, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of one of her more jaw-dropping insights. Oddly enough, suggests Hartman, the recuperative project that was the new feminist historiography initially acted *against* the very recuperation that was its mission. It “overlooked domestic settings in favor of public ones, presenting women as making an entrance onto the ‘historical stage’ only in the modern era, with their roles as factory workers or as participants in suffrage and other reform movements” (*Household*, 11). In a remark that proves especially germane to the so-called bossy women of medieval French farce whom we are about to meet, she goes on to state that “an interpretive tension remains to this day between the portrayal of women as independent social actors, on the one hand, and as eternal victims of forces beyond their control, on the other” (11). Counterintuitively, a feminist project had the potential to obscure, compromise, or damage

our perception of the power of women. “What this has meant in practice,” Hartman concludes, “is that family households have not only been regularly presented as permanent sites of women’s oppression but have also been dismissed as places where women could be imagined as significant social actors” (11). Since the French farce could not have commented more blatantly on the significance of female social actors, for my own part, I state that the medieval French farcical corpus specializes in binders full of women. And I conclude that they can be unbound. Their acts will be seen here, their agency felt, and their voices heard.

Farce has been known to unbind them, of course, typically for the wrong reasons, by undressing them and dumbing them down. I unbind them by dressing them up and redressing their brains. Indeed, I hope to have achieved a translation that is *deliberately unfaithful* to its originary misogyny *but no less philologically accurate*. As an art form, theater presents a vision *of* and *for* action. So, when bringing a sexist repertoire back to life, the translator turns all the infinite instability, virtuality, and potentiality to her advantage. And I do mean *her* advantage.² She faces up to the perils of a language whose intimacies are easily lost in translation as she stares down the momentous question of whether certain vile materials *should never be translated at all*, whether they deserve to be lost. Finally, she may elect to determine that the politically incorrect itself becomes correctible for the modern world. She may deem it feasible, desirable, and ethical to commit welcome acts of translational appropriation. And, ultimately, she may opt not only to convey faithfully an offensive medieval moral of a farcical story but to betray it in such a way that we can understand and appreciate its wit today. Therefore, a faithful translation of a potentially faithless theater paints a picture both of what something is and of what it could—or *should*—be. The theatrical medium is, was, and ever shall be highly sociable, even when antisocial; for better or for worse, it can, does, and ever should engage us.

On Anonymity, Naming, and Renaming

All twelve anonymous plays host many unnamed characters, usually the women. When unnamed personages appear in the Middle French originals by their generic names (the Wife, the Husband, the Lover, and so on), I list the generic name in capital letters in the Casts of Characters. Much as I have

done for the untitled or minimally titled plays, I delight in baptizing all the female characters. She's got a name. He doesn't. For one thing, this enhances the legibility of any piece of stage action that, if confusing on the page, is not so *on the stage*. For another thing, in naming the unnamed female characters but not the male ones, again, I turn right side up the farceurs' upside-down misogyny. This is part and parcel of that strategy of feminist *traduction engagée*.

Critical Apparatus

It remains my working principle that no reader of this book need read either Middle French or modern French. Since this collection is intended not only for scholars but for students and theater practitioners, I've endeavored to create a critical apparatus that is friendly to all.

That was not so easy. Let's just say that, if medievalists adore copious documentation, undergraduates habitually find, à la Franz Joseph in *Amadeus*, that there are "too many notes." Plus no actor wants to hold a four-pound script. What can I say? I've sought a middle ground of user-friendliness for a fun but complex repertoire that eschews the middle in favor of extremes. Even so, while I've done all that I could to keep the endnotes to a minimum, this is, after all, medieval studies: accommodations had to be made. Sometimes, the philology, the morphology, the pun, the lexicon, the paleography, or the codicology was sufficiently scrambled to warrant extensive explanations.

Whenever workable, I employ parenthetical documentation for frequently cited works (above, "On Abbreviations"); and, when there is no confusion as to which work is being referenced, I don't provide a note at all. Also, unless it is to identify the Middle French edition(s) of my base text, I lean toward citing only English-language sources and only one such source. I beg your indulgence up front if that source happens to be one of my own books. That is because, while the present critical apparatus is scholarly, it is far from complete; whereas, in my other writings, I have compiled extensive bibliographies for those seeking to know more. Where I have cited a French source, any translation into English is my own unless otherwise indicated.

"Brief Plot Summaries" will guide your choice of readings; and each play's "Production Notes," indicating the editions that I follow, are arranged under five categories, designed to anticipate the likely queries of readers, di-

rectors, actors, and dramaturges: “Plot,” “Characters and Character Development,” “Language,” “Sets and Staging,” and “Costumes and Props.” One caveat concerns the fungibility of those categories, which are oftentimes inextricable one from the other. Such plays as #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*; #7, *Holy Deadlock*; #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*; #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*; and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* revolve around an overarching pun, proverb, joke, song, or ritual that is as integral to plot as it is to character, language, or staging. I also distinguish between the language of the characters (§ “Characters and Character Development”) and the language of the author(s) (§ “Language”). Under the rubric of the former, I treat the speech patterns and idiosyncrasies of the individual *dramatis personae*: their use and abuse of grammar, their musical tastes, histrionic propensities, linguistic tics, archaisms, *sotto voces* to the audience, regional accents, and their lexicon, which is commonly a hilarious admixture of elegance with vulgarity, *vous* with *tu*, prim and proper with potty mouth.³ Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Persephone in #9, *Wife Swap*: “Blow me. I’m off to Mass!” Under the rubric “Language,” I examine the play’s important metaphors—militaristic, gastronomic, theological, mythological, epic, lyric, and so on—as well as any apparently untranslatable idioms, puns, and proverbs.

An additional category, “Performance History,” is provided for plays #7, *Holy Deadlock* and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*—though with near certainty only for #7. Alas, the record on this score is scant and unreliable. (And speaking of performance, this book has an “Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials,” regarding the incorporation of modern songs, in keeping with the musical exuberance of the original farces.)

It’s fair to say that these “Production Notes” cover a lot of territory; but there was still a need for endnotes, which I normally provide in the following cases: to clarify an ambiguity or a singular challenge to translation; to correct an error in a manuscript or edition; to announce a likely misattribution of a line or a speech; to mark a change from *vous* to *tu*; to signal a new versification scheme; to sneak in an extra joke as your payoff for going all the way to the end of the book to find the note; or to flag a “metacommentary alert” (*FF*, 45) when a play self-consciously spotlights its own self-consciousness. (Farce loves its verbs of disguise, pretense, impersonation, or role-playing, particularly *contrefaire* [“to counterfeit”] and *faindre* [“to fake” or “to pretend”].) Finally, the endnotes supply details for any theater company contemplating use of copyrighted musical materials in performance (see § “Prose, Verse, Music, and Choreography” below, and “Appendix”).

Editions and Printed Sources

Eleven of the plays presented here have never been translated into English, and only six have been translated into modern French: #2, *The Shithouse*; #3, *Pots and Scams*; #4, *For the Birds*; #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*; #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*; and #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*. *Pots and Scams* is the exception: In *Six Medieval French Farces (SMFF)*, Thierry Boucquey translated the *Farce du Chaudronnier* into English as *The Farce of the Kettle Maker*; but I wanted a bawdier update. To my knowledge, the other six plays have never been translated into any modern vernacular: #1, *The Newlywed Game*, #6; *Match, Point, Counterpoint*; #7, *Holy Deadlock*; #9, *Wife Swap*; #10, *Husband Swap*; and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*. The number of medieval French farces available in English is still quite low; but, with “*Holy Deadlock*” and *Further Ribaldries* in hand, Anglophones now have access to thirty-five of the some two hundred extant.⁴ If I have anything to say about it in my subsequent volumes, those readers will eventually have almost fifty more.

Our twelve plays survive in three of the four premier sixteenth-century compilations: the *Recueil du British Museum*, the *Recueil La Vallière*, and the *Recueil Cohen*.⁵ Six are from the *Recueil du British Museum* (#1, #3, #4, #5, #8, #11); however, there are two versions of #4, *For the Birds*, for which I follow the one that appears in the *Recueil Cohen*. Five of the present dozen are from the *Recueil La Vallière* (#2, #6, #7, #9, #10); and one is an early printed book (#12). All three *Recueils* reproduce playtexts thought to predate their publication. The *Recueil du British Museum* contains sixty-four plays, forty-seven of them farces. The *Recueil La Vallière* comprises seventy-four plays, forty-eight of them farces; it was copied in Rouen in the 1570s and sold in 1780 by its owner, the Duke of La Vallière (whence its name). And the *Recueil Cohen*, first discovered in Florence in 1928, bears the name of the renowned medievalist Gustave Cohen, who first edited it as *Recueil de Farces françaises inédites du XV^e siècle*, after which it disappeared for many years—only to be rediscovered, reedited, rebaptized, and republished in 2011 by Jelle Koopmans as the *Recueil de Florence*. It houses fifty-three plays, all called “farces,” all believed to have circulated in print between 1540 and 1550 (*FF*, 38–43).⁶

In preparing these translations, I have sought advice from all the Middle French and modern French editions along with several facsimile editions. For those wishing to consult the Middle French, I have tried to make the process as straightforward as possible by citing print and online editions when these are readily available: Le Roux de Lincy and Michel’s *Recueil de farces*,

moralités et sermons joyeux (RFMSJ); Viollet le Duc's *Ancien Théâtre français* (ATF); Cohen's *Recueil de Farces françaises inédites du XV^e siècle* (RC); and Fournier's *Théâtre français avant la Renaissance* (TFR). In the case of #7, *Holy Deadlock*, and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, I also have occasion to draw on a superb edition that is as sagacious as it is inaccessible: Michel Rousse's unpublished *thèse d'état*, *Le Théâtre des farces en France au Moyen Âge* (TFFMA). To those curious about my process: it was only after finalizing my own translations that I consulted such later critical editions as Faivre, *Les Farces*; Koopmans, *Recueil de Florence* (RFlorence); Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties* (RGS); Mabille, *Choix de farces* (CFSM); Rousse, TFFMA; and, above all, the unmatched tour de force of André Tissier in his editions and modern French translations of sixty-five farces: the thirteen-volume *Recueil de farces (1450–1550)* (RF) and the terrific four-volume *Farces françaises de la fin du Moyen Âge* (FFMA).

While there was something restorative and rejuvenating about relying on the nineteenth-century editions that brought these glorious plays to our attention in the first place, they also benefit from updated print conventions. I have resolved abbreviations, regularized the spelling of titles and names of characters, and modernized such archaisms as “j” for “i,” and “v” for “u.” I have also added diacriticals when meaning is unambiguous: the preposition *à* receives its *accent grave* or a naked *e*, its *accent aigu* (*é*).

A further issue concerns pagination and verse numbers or, rather, their absence or complexity. Only Cohen's edition of the *Recueil Cohen* features verse numbers; they are absent from RFMSJ, ATF, and from *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*. At times, it is practical to specify verse numbers from Tissier (RF), Picot (RGS), or Rousse (TFFMA), which I do, like so: (RGS, vv. 10–15).

For *Ancien Théâtre français*, a ten-volume series of which the first three volumes unveil editions of the plays of the *Recueil du British Museum*, the first reference lists the editor, title abbreviation, volume number, and page (e.g., Viollet le Duc, ATF, 1: 2). Thereafter, within the play in question, I simplify matters by referencing the volume and page number alone (e.g., 1: 2).

For the four-volume edition of the *Recueil La Vallière* (RFMSJ), I adopt the same procedure (e.g., Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, RFMSJ, 4: 23) and, thenceforth, (4: 23). Matters are more complicated in RFMSJ, however, in that each play begins at its own page 1. Pagination is not continuous within a given volume, let alone over the four volumes.

In pleasant contradistinction to RFMSJ, the Rousse TFFMA is over-determined. His five-volume TFFMA is paginated continuously both within

each volume and across all five volumes. When verse numbers are helpful for #7, *Holy Deadlock*, I have opted for the latter (i.e., the continuous pagination across volumes).

Reminders of these practices will appear in the “Production Notes” to each farce alongside information about the base text that I follow. And that’s all I have to say about that, except to reiterate that, for ease of reading the Middle French of the endnotes, I have made many silent minor emendations (of punctuation, diacritics, spelling, and the like).

Order of Presentation

It’s a grand old tradition that an anthologist structures a collection in the way that she or he sees fit. After weighing such options as the original order of appearance in the *Recueils* or the date of publication, I’ve opted for a kind of chronology of marriage itself. The farcical state of holy wedlock will proceed through the connubial stages that are so painstakingly pondered by our protagonists: What is marriage like? What in the name of all that’s holy was everybody thinking by getting hitched? And, when no bliss is forthcoming, can you trade in your spouse for a new model?

Our first play, *The Newlywed Game*, is also the first play of the *Recueil du British Museum*. If it was good enough for the anonymous compiler to accord it such a prize spot, it’s good enough for me. Short, accessible, and timeless, it makes excellent inroads into the unholy deadlock of the subsequent five plays: #2, *The Shithouse*, #3, *Pots and Scams*, #4, *For the Birds*, #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*, and #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint*. All five explore a seemingly endless enumeration of marital anxieties related to infidelity, sexual equality, and even biology.

Halfway through life’s marital journey, we come to a literal crossroads. Our title cut, #7, *Holy Deadlock*, stages a pilgrimage route to marriage. Unusually long, labyrinthine, and sacrilegious, this play fares better when the contextual groundwork has been laid by other farces. It then serves as the perfect segue, first to the pseudomedical explanations of spousal incompatibility expounded in #8, *Bitches and Pussycats* and, ultimately, to the closing four spouse-swapping plays: #9, *Wife Swap*, #10, *Husband Swap*, #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*. Do notice that, as remarked in the “Introduction,” our grand finale is chronologically so late (published in 1600) that it’s not normally part of anybody’s Middle

Ages. No problem. The afterlife of medieval farce was long and healthy. Just ask Molière.

Stage Directions

Think, for a second, about that curious French fondness for the so-called genius of Jerry Lewis. For the authors, actors, and audiences of farce, the ample room made for mime, slapstick, and physical comedy is unparalleled (*FF*, 8–9). Consider #3, *Pots and Scams*, in which the entire plot revolves around a mimed silence contest. How might we reenvision their vision today?

Stage directions are relatively rare in medieval French farce. When they are present—more so in the *Recueil du British Museum* than in the *Recueil La Vallière*—I italicize them. Naturally, they may also be intuited from such scripted language as “Go get your fiddle” or “It’s time to pass the hat.” For the most part, though, I have crafted my own *didascalie*, which always appear italicized within brackets. I make multiple suggestions for scene breaks, locations, sets, costumes, and props: so many that they might strike you as overdetermined. I contend, however, that if my stage directions diminish the readerly and dramaturgical freedom to visualize the scene more individually and idiosyncratically, they augment clarity and comprehension.

Money, Money, Money

Much more than the plays in the “*The Farce of the Fart*” and *Other Ribaldries*, the marriage farces resonate with the clanging of cold hard cash—and in the distinct denominations of *écus*, *ducats*, *francs*, *livres*, *sous*, and *deniers*. Obviously, this volume is about as far from an economics textbook as one could possibly imagine; nevertheless, a stable translation of often unstable currencies was essential. The question turned less on your translator’s very real—and very embarrassing—innumeracy and more on comedic “accuracy.” Especially in such a play as #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*: Are the financial values of a given play ridiculously low? Ridiculously high? Plain ridiculous and not intended to reflect any kind of economic reality at all?

This is farce. The legal tender is funny money. While I have made every effort to respect the precise values of medieval coinage—if anything, I’ve

overcompensated for inflation—any translational zeal for exactitude cannot obscure what is capital to the genre.

Thanks to two superlative studies—Peter Spufford’s *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* and Marie-Thérèse Boyer-Xambeu et al.’s *Private Money and Public Currencies*—we know a great deal about economic history. Both Spufford (397–410) and Boyer-Xambeu (114–15) proffer intricate tables that help to ascertain the gold content of an *écu* or a *ducat* (the latter of largely Italian provenance). There, we glean such information as this: gold *écus* and *ducats* were more or less equivalent, containing approximately the same precious metal content; gold content was fairly stable, whereas silver content was not; and valuation was very much dependent on where and when the coins were minted, and on whether the *ducat* was Italian, Spanish, or even Hungarian. As for Tissier, who compiled a handy guide (albeit with calculations that predate the euro): a *denier* was worth one-twelfth of a *sou*; a gold *ducat*, ten to twelve *francs*; an *écu ordinaire*, about three *francs*; and both the *franc* and the *livre* (or *livre tournois*) were equal to twenty *sous* (*RF*, 6: 449; 150n). It’s a word problem from high-school math class; and it’s a problem for even a mathematically unchallenged translator. To begin with, there are many types of *écu* and *ducat*; and the specific type is not customarily invoked in any given play. Strive though one might to be “on the money,” farce is by and large silent on the technicalities of just what is being tendered.⁷ For my money, then, the next best thing was to apply a uniform, proportionally correct standard to its shifty finances. In this anthology (and in USD), a gold *ducat* will be worth about \$200 USD, an *écu* roughly \$100, and a *franc* or a *livre*, about \$20. For the coins of lesser value, a *sou* will equal about \$1, and a *denier*, about a dime.⁸

Grammar, Style, and “Foreign-Language” Materials

Much to the potential embarrassment of the characters of farce—to say nothing of students worldwide—we’re talking about mastery of the French language or, more commonly, the lack thereof. Among the linguistic features marked for ridicule: grammar, syntax, malapropisms, mispronunciations, dialects, regionalisms, and, alas, accent. When you think comic stereotype, think *accent*. Try to imagine what might be conveyed—and betrayed—about character by a regional accent that is exaggerated like crazy: Italian,

British, French, Spanish, Puerto Rican, New York, Queens, Southern, Italian American (of the Cosa Nostra variety), gangsta, and so on. Even when I've not scripted such a telltale accent, try to hear one anyway. On occasion, when a nonnative speaker becomes the butt of a joke, the humor is classist, racist, and ethnocentric, making it daunting to translate. Perhaps nowhere is that more apparent than in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*, where Father Amadeus communicates by means of an Italianate, macaronic gibberish that, by analogy to Franglais, I call Fritalian. I hope to have met these considerable challenges by exploiting farce's own infinite capacity to parody itself.

In another key trend of farce, think too about what motivates people to embed foreign words into everyday speech. *Entre nous*, what could be more pretentious? I guess it has something to do with *haute culture*. Classy and shit. *Mais oui*, Americans do it all the time, usually in French. Overpronouncing French words is even a running gag on *Seinfeld*. For medieval and Renaissance French people, the language of choice for conspicuous consumption of upward mobility was not Italian but Latin—or, here, what I call Flatin (FF, 374–75), a macaronic analogue to Franglais or Fritalian. And, *entre Basochiens*, it was all about in-jokes at the expense of the many lower-born, clueless citizens with delusions of social grandeur. Evidently, the young lawyers in training found mangled Latin hysterical. In other words, the nature of language itself was the punch line, generally punched up in these translations through puns, mime, and allusions to popular culture that include film and television. For such allusions, I prefer not to overload the critical apparatus and elect instead to provide simply the date of the film's release or the episode's first air date. All part of my own brand of Jody macaroni.

Prose, Verse, Music, and Choreography

In the wake of a resurgence of critical interest in the Broadway musical, how is it that medieval French farce hasn't attracted more attention? Curses! Middle French strikes again! Certainly, the genre deserves to retake its rightful place in both music history and the history of the musical.

From Aristophanes to baroque opera to vaudeville to Broadway, married couples seem eternally destined to give one another a song and dance. Much as a classicist would be attuned to the phenomenon in, say, Lucian of Samosata's satirical dialogue "The Dance," a medievalist is likewise attuned to the powerful comedic kinship among mime, music, and dance.⁹ The charac-

ters of farce are constantly breaking into tuneful offerings that have mostly been lost to history but that were undoubtedly much in vogue in their day.¹⁰ Music is everywhere and, as they say on *American Idol*, song choice is key; music speaks volumes about personality. And about caricature. Life is a cabaret®—literally so in #9, *Wife Swap*. It's dinner theater. It's the bar in Vegas, replete with lounge lizards. It's a variety show. It's the French music hall à la Edith Piaf. It's the hokey French *Ed Sullivan Show* wannabe, *Champs-Élysées* (1982–90). It's folk, it's rock, it's country but, most of all, it's music and musical comedy. And don't forget dance: farce gets pretty specific about those too.¹¹ When life is a drag, farce gives you a drag show.

Music forms community. It informs the rituals of daily life. You know what I mean: at a wedding, the maid of honor toasts the bride and groom with “All you need is love, love is all you need.”® Attendees probably hear the Beatles song, “All You Need Is Love.” Similarly, if I say *kumbaya*, you might be old enough to conjure summer nights of campfires past. (If you go with rap or hip-hop, in all likelihood, the reference will go right over my head.) Such was the medieval performance situation. All that early spectators would have needed was a line, a phrase, a refrain, a dance move. If an actor hummed a few bars or started a well-known corporeal shtick, audiences could fake it by singing along, by seeing the dancing or miming in their mind's eye, or by hearing the music in their heads. Needless to say, that can in no way be the case for us. Oftentimes, we don't even recognize which *part* of the song is being cited, which needn't necessarily be the title at all or, for that matter, the first line or the refrain. It might well be something more subtle still, like a beloved performer's signature rendition of the snippet in question. At centuries' remove, the trick lies in spotting all the musical intertexts today. It bears mentioning that that holds true for spotting postmedieval lyrics as well. If, upon encountering one of the copyright symbols used in this volume, you're familiar with the song title alone, you might not recognize my allusion to a lyric from the third verse or the bridge. I submit that such potential confusion makes for an excellent translation of the medieval and modern phenomenon according to which music enters a language.

To read a medieval farce without the music is tantamount to evaluating the script of *Pippin* with nary a note from the score or a step from the choreography. Faced with printed texts alone, we are no longer on the same page; but that doesn't mean that we can't get there.

If marriage has no rhyme or reason to it, then the compleat farce takes on one of its favorite institutions with rhyme and reason. I don't know whether

these dozen plays are more musically and poetically sophisticated than the first twelve of *FF* or whether I've simply gotten better at hearing the unsung. But, in the domestic setting, farceurs definitely pulled out all the stops. Production numbers abound: everything from an inserted lyric set piece to a zany parade. When it is clear as a bell that a character is *singing*, I have contrived to ensure that their serenades are not lost in translation. Throughout this book, I venture rough dramaturgical equivalents for the medieval golden oldies, all flagged by the copyright symbol (©). Once again, however, this is a practice complex enough to warrant a special section akin to its lengthier predecessor (*FF*, 401–6)—the “Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials.” The purpose of the present section on “Prose, Verse, Music, and Choreography” is to establish how indeed we come to realize that music is everywhere.

For the plays of *“Holy Deadlock”* and *Further Ribaldries*, there are a number of clues. A good half of them reprise the structure of the lyric genre known as the *tenso* or *jeu parti*, a musical debate routinely waged about the relative merits of love. Elsewhere, musical moments tend to be marked by deviations from the standard of rhyming octosyllabic couplets. Those couplets are the bread and butter of the farcical medium, and they suit it to a tee. There is something about those octosyllables that proves eminently suitable to the wackiness of farce: a breathlessness, a compactness of content, a refusal to pull poetic punches (because that's the characters' job?). Count with me now: 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4: *You-have-no-time, it's-just-eight-feet*. By the same token, anything other than that norm is immediately conspicuous. Sometimes, a deviation is clearly accidental: the copyist dropped a line, creating an orphaned rhyme. (Such omissions, by the way, bestow upon the translator the glorious gift of guessing and recreating the lost content, always stating when she has done so.) Sometimes, though, the change is clearly deliberate, as when octosyllabic couplets give way to regular verses of five, ten, or twelve poetic feet, some with two rhymes per line instead of one (as in Scene 2 of #7, *Holy Deadlock*). All such instances stand out as marked, dramatic, offbeat, as it were; and I have frequently interpreted them as call-outs for song, dance, mime, or instrumentation.

Desperate marriages called for desperate poetic measures. I am no poet but, then again, neither were a lot of the playwrights. Their balladry can have all the grace, sublimity, and subtlety of a Top 40 hit. Therefore, when dealing with the poetic set pieces, I translate doggerel as doggerel and, for two of the

plays, I do something yet more radical. In one case, I script an unusually grandiloquent character wholly in iambic pentameter; and, in the other, I render an entire play in free octosyllabic verse.¹² Otherwise, my *modus operandi* is to signal the set pieces by proposing first a prose version, then a musicopoeitic one. Especially in the four final, spouse-swapping plays, this affinity for doubling is consistent with the farceurs' own propensity for repetition, mirror imagery, and echolalia.¹³ If my own redoubled efforts at doubling strike you as redundant or, if you're a director anxious about run-time, then, by all means, pick one or the other in performance. But I assure you: repetition and repetitiveness belong to the stuff and nonsense of farce (*FF*, 48–49).

And now, sit back, relax, and enjoy the show.

Brief Plot Summaries

1. *The Newlywed Game* [*Le Conseil au Nouveau Marié*]

For two actors: Herman, the Newlywed Husband (Le Mary); and Doc Phil, the Doctor (Le Docteur)

Desperate after a distinctly unsatisfactory first week of marriage, poor Herman consults with an advisor, who is part doctor, part lawyer, part life coach. Jaded though Doc Phil is, he instructs the incompetent newlywed in the ins and outs of holy wedlock.

2. *The Shithouse* [*Le Retraict*]

For four to six actors: the Husband (Le Mary); Kitty, the Wife (La Femme); Willy, the Valet (Guillot); Sir Allcock, the Lover (L'Amoureux, Monsieur Lacoque); [the Cat], and [a Neighbor Lady, the Husband's Mistress]

Wily Willy, the Valet, manages to make out like a bandit assisting in the assignation between his mistress, Kitty, and her Lover, the dandyish Sir Allcock. Allcock arrives with a picnic; but, when the Husband arrives home at an inopportune moment, the poor Lover has nowhere to hide but the latrine. He is forced to shove his head—and more?—into the privy hole, literally shitfaced after an interrupted feast.

3. *Pots and Scams*, or, *The Farce of the Kettle-Maker* [*Un Chaudronnier*]

For three actors: Will, the Man, a Cobbler (L'Homme/Guillemin); Hill, the Wife (La Femme/Hannin); and the Kettle-Maker (Le Chaudronnier)

A domestic dispute leads to a bet between a husband and a wife as to who can remain silent longer. Enter the Kettle-Maker, who takes full advantage of their mutism in order to make outrageous physical advances on both of them. When Will finally speaks up to defend his wife's honor, he loses the bet.

4. *For the Birds*, or, *Conjugal Birdplay* [*La Mauvaistié des femmes*]

For two actors: Connor, the Husband (Rifflart); and Maggie, the Wife (Finette)

Marriage is literally for the birds as Connor and Maggie do battle about whether to place a cuckoo or a magpie inside the cage that Connor is finishing. So which bird will it be? A cuckoo cuckold or a yacking magpie? Somebody is to be all cooped up permanently and, alas, that's what marriage is all about.

5. *The Jackass Conjecture*, or, *Animal Husbandry* [*Le Pont aux ânes*]

For five to six actors: Johnno, the Husband (Johannes); Jenny, the Wife (Dame Niche); Padre Amadeus (Messire Domine Dé); the Woodsman; and Molly, the Mule (L'ânesse Nolly)

Is your wife stubborn as a mule? A strange Italian cleric can teach you the game of love. Just get thee to the "Bridge of Asses" and watch how any woodsman beats an old gal into submission. The Woodsman's beast of burden is an ass, whereas Johnno's wife is just a Jenny. But the lesson to bring on home is that even a dumb ass like Johnno can learn to whip a woman into line.

6. *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, or, *The Old Lover vs. the Young Lover* [*Le Viel Amoureux et le Jeune Amoureux*]

For two actors: Wayne Newson, the Old Lover (Le Viel Amoureux); and Beau Jest, the Young Lover (Le Jeune Amoureux)

Are women worth it? "Nay," says the old man. "Way," says the young dude in a lyrical debate, largely in song, about the relative merits and demerits of women. The only ladies about whom the gents can agree are their own mamas.

7. *Holy Deadlock*, or, *The Pilgrimage of Marriage* [*Le Pèlerinage de mariage*]

For five actors: "Biddy and the Pilgrimettes" (Les Trois Pèlerines)—individually, Biddy, the Old Pilgrimess, a Spinster (La Vie[il]le/La Première Pèlerine); Juicy Lucy, the Second Pilgrimess (La Deuxième Pèlerine); and Prudence, the Third Pilgrimess (La Troisième Pèlerine)—plus the Old Pilgrim (Le Viel Pèlerin); and the Young Pilgrim (Le Jeune Pèlerin)

Should a man—or a woman—undertake the pilgrimage toward marriage? Most folks think it's a grand idea, especially the eager and impul-

sive young. This is a bona fide musical comedy, complete with music, song, dance, and some positively sacrilegious pseudoprayers and processions; it is also a blistering satire of all that's holy. Chaucer had nothing on this wacky pilgrimage, in which everyone—the audience included—participates in desacralizing the sacrament of marriage.

8. *Bitches and Pussycats*, or, *Butting Heads, Peace of Ass* [*Les Deux Maris et leurs deux femmes dont l'une a male tête et l'autre est tendre du cul*]

For four actors: Colin, the First Husband (Colin); Jude, the Second Husband (Mathieu); Lexie, the First Wife (Alix); and Jean, the Second Wife (Jehanne)

Colin and Jude engage in a debate, à la lyric poetry. Their subject? A differential diagnosis of the female corporeal situation. All women, they claim, fall into one of two categories: hotheaded and faithful or hot-bottomed and unfaithful. Both sorts need to vent their frustrations. The men wonder which relief valve is better: the head or the ass? Scenes from two marriages decide that momentous question.

9. *Wife Swap: A Musical Comedy*, or, *The Taming, Pas de Deux* [*Le Savatier, Marguet, Jacquet, Proserpine et l'Oste*]

For five actors: Blotto, the Cobbler (Le Savatier); Margie, Blotto's Wife (Marguet); Jacko (Jacquet); Persephone, Jacko's Wife (Proserpine); and the Innkeeper (L'Oste)

Life is a cabaret in this medieval forerunner to reality TV, in which Blotto and Jacko decide to swap wives. Blotto seems bored with the docile Margie; Jacko can't handle the abusive Persephone. But the taming of that shrew has some surprising results. Do the spouses keep their new partners? Or do they return to the old ones? In performance, only time, translation, and directing will tell.

10. *Husband Swap*, or, *Swap Meat* [*Le Trocheur de maris*]

For four actors: the Husband Trader (Le Trocheur de Maris); Cindy Lou, the First Wife (La Première Commère); Charlotte, the Second Wife (La Deuxième Commère); and Anna Nicole, the Third Wife (La Troisième Commère)

For three housewives, the deficiencies of their respective spouses make for an extensive bill of particulars. Enter the Husband Trader, with quite

the stock of male merchandise. As he presents the ladies with specimen after specimen, they must come to a decision as to whether they prefer a newer model to the devils they know. To swap or not to swap? That is the question.

11. *Extreme Husband Makeover, or, Lost and Foundry* [*Les Femmes qui font refondre leurs maris*]

For five actors: Calvin (Thibault); Jenny, Calvin's Wife (Jennette); Ebenezer (Collart); Penny, Ebenezer's Wife (Pernette); and the Bell-Maker, Smitty Black, the Great Rejuvenator (Le Fondeur de Cloches)

Over-the-hill geezers Calvin and Ebenezer mean well, but all the money in the world cannot provide sexual satisfaction to their wives, Jenny and Penny. The girls thus seek the assistance of an unusual practitioner: a Bell-Maker. For a steep fee, he is willing to melt down the raw material and reforge two new husbands. But let the buyer beware: such a recast might not yield the desired remodel.

12. *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* [*Les Hommes qui font saller leurs femmes*]

For five actors: Marcel (Marceau); Julian (Jullien); Gilly, Marcel's Wife (Gillette, femme de Marceau); Françoise, Julian's Wife (Françoise, femme de Jullien); and Professor Pylon, a Philosopher (Maistre Macé)

Marcel and Julian find that their wives, Gilly and Françoise, are too sugary sweet. Anxious about possible infidelity, they bid Professor Pylon, PhD, to doctor the girls up with a salt bath. Highly offended, the ladies refuse the procedure and, to their husbands' chagrin, they have no trouble at all getting salty on their own.

The PLAYS

Actors' Prologue

Medieval theater troupes often opened and closed their dramas (comic or serious) with a plea for understanding, begging the indulgence of spectators along these lines: Do not hold the poor actors liable for offensive utterances not spoken in their own voices. Please: no accusations of libel, heresy, treason, or lèse-majesté. Things might well be rather different today; but, in 1993, even farceurs like Beavis and Butthead felt the legal heat of a lawsuit alleging that the incendiary cartoon had led to real acts of arson ("Cartoon on MTV Blamed for Fire"). Whence, this humble offering, a sonnet for the actors, designed to assist them in hedging their legal bets, lest holy wedlock lead to legal deadlock:

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE COMPANY

The curtain now shall rise upon the past,
For holy wedlock won't make sense without it.
But don't you blanch: it's farce, folks, it's a gas.
Open your eyes, your ears, your nose. You doubt it?

We're all here to provoke you, don'tcha know?
It's time to make some changes around here.
It's wedded bliss: just tell us to go blow!
There's medieval truth beneath our sneer.

We're thinking that these plays are kinda cute
But you guys are PC, we've heard the rumor.
So grin and bear it! Don't you file suit.
It's marriage! Where the hell's your sense of humor?

You came to see the show; nobody forced you.
You give us a hard time, we'll just divorce you.

1.

The Newlywed Game

Le Conseil au Nouveau Marié

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HERMAN, the NEWLYWED HUSBAND (Le Mary)

DOC PHIL, the DOCTOR (Le Docteur)

[The Wife]

[Another actor to play Herman in flashback]

[A number of Law Students in the audience]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The anonymous *Le Conseil au Nouveau Marié, à deux personnages, c'est assavoir: Le Mary et le Docteur*, was first published in Lyon in 1547 by the well-known Barnabé Chaussard; it is the first of the sixty-four plays of the *Recueil du British Museum*. Edited only by Viollet le Duc (*ATF*, 1: 1–10), the play is #89¹ of those summarized by Petit de Julleville in *RTC* (125); it is also summarized by Faivre in *Répertoire*, #36 (114–15). To my knowledge, there is no modern French or English translation. When referencing this play of 262 octosyllabic verses comprising rhymed octosyllabic couplets, I do so by volume and page number alone. (As noted in “About This Translation,” Viollet le Duc does not provide verse numbers.)

Plot

Marital advice is a matter of some urgency for a certain newlywed, who is unnamed in the original text but whom I’ve called Herman (as in: he’s *her* man, and he’s not in control). Although he has been married to his nubile eighteen-year-old bride for barely twenty-four hours, the woefully inexperi-

enced Herman is already worried enough to anticipate the worst. So what's a guy to do?

What else? Seek the counsel of someone who is woefully experienced in law, medicine, love, and marriage: someone who is part doctor and part lawyer, but mostly lawyer. Beset with anxieties about jealousy, anger, and the excesses of alcohol and sex, Herman heads straight for the medieval equivalent of a life coach, the better to learn how to behave—and how to get his bride to behave—in the state of holy wedlock. As he preventatively puts the cart before the horse (albeit without the literal dramatization of carts and quadrupeds that we shall see in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*), the newly wedded Herman airs his consternation about his spouse's character flaws, real or imagined, to the counselor I've dubbed "Doc Phil." The play then draws inspiration from traditions of lyric dialogue, scholastic debate, and conduct manuals as its plot unfolds as a scene of advice giving.

In response to the new husband's pointed queries, Phil is brutally frank and pulls no punches. He even goes so far as to proffer a pitiful confession about his own shortcomings, all the while recommending that Herman practice patience, kindness, and a firm hand as he faces the marital torments to come. Far and away the most extensive guidance concerns the perils of alcoholism, which the good "doctor" describes as the scourge of the day and a veritable epidemic (*maladie incurable*). For a fifteenth-century audience, his orderly, systematic presentation of the issues would have been evocative of scholasticism or even of a "quodlibet" (a very public disputation that tested MA students in theology at the University of Paris).² For contemporary viewers, the detailed exposition of the three types of drunkenness evokes the classic Larry Miller stand-up sketch, the "Five Levels of Drinking,"³ even as the play's title evokes the mid-1960s game show hosted by Bob Eubanks, *The Newlywed Game*. For all we know, our whole play was medieval stand-up at its kitschiest.

Although this newlywed game has attracted scant critical interest, it is quite fascinating in a number of respects, beginning with this: in terms of verisimilitude alone, one would normally expect that the medieval spouse in need of honeymoon advice would be the wife, not the husband. Also, it is well worth noting that, notwithstanding the farcical propensity for Pyrrhic female victories, this is a rare comedy in which husbands are instructed to be nice to their wives. Granted, Phil advocates fear in order to achieve that end and, legalistically minded by nature, he alludes to the occasional loophole. But, in a farcical repertoire that is so often dominated by physical violence,

it is refreshing to hear at least a partial message of understanding and compassion rather than one of corporal punishment and subordination. That takeaway prompts us to wonder whether some kind of social good might conceivably have come from farce. It is consistent, moreover, with Faivre's sensible speculation that *The Newlywed Game* was likely a piece of wedding entertainment (*farce de nocés*), although we need not necessarily agree with how he arrives at that conclusion.

Surprisingly, the usually astute Faivre complained of the play's pedantic and "monotonous structure" of Q and A. He also found the piece unrealistic—and not in the good way typically connoted by farce's much beloved exaggeration or *démésure*. Instead, he was disappointed to see Herman's far too speedy acceptance of Doc Phil's propositions and, even more so, to be obliged to wait till the end of the play for a discussion of sexual positions. To Faivre's taste, *The Newlywed Game* wasn't "over the top" enough; so he dubbed it a mere "dialogue lacking in all dramatic action rather than a farce." He then posited that it must have been designed for "static recitation rather than for true theatrical performance" (*Répertoire*, 114–15). Faivre's readerly dissatisfaction even led him to the "wedding farce" hypothesis in that its anodyne stasis would have shocked or offended no one, not even the worst of the stuffed shirts in attendance (*Répertoire*, 115).

What can I say? He is wrong on all counts.

For one thing, "static recitation" is something of an oxymoron, most notably in the hands of the histrionic Basochiens, whose performances were inherently dramatic and indubitably theatrical (*ROMD*, 141–48). For another thing, the play's lyrical setting is precisely what promises to bring the action musically to life in performance. And for yet another thing: Who says realism can't be funny? Or that stuffed shirts can't have a sense of humor, especially if a group of Basochiens has been contracted to perform at a wedding? I mean: If you invited comedian Kathy Griffin to give a toast at your nuptials, what would you expect? Seriously.

Perhaps most striking of all in *The Newlywed Game* is the degree of artistic self-consciousness or metacommentary. Doc Phil's key piece of advice? Never let on. Put on an act. Fake it till you make it—an adage that holds true for actors as well as for newlyweds. Furthermore, in one of the most intriguing moves of the farcical corpus, this particular play wraps with what I can only think to call advertising. The Newlywed Herman asks whether he can find all the learned counselor's wisdom written down somewhere.⁴ If that's not a plug for a self-help book—an invitation that audiences stop by their

friendly neighborhood printer—then I don’t know what is. At the very least, this is a theater company serving notice that any printer in the crowd should take heed and publish the play. Thus, *The Newlywed Game* sheds new light on the interplay among writing, speaking, teaching, and publishing, all as related to the enactment of its advice not only on the stage but in real-life bedrooms—and courtrooms—everywhere.⁵

Characters and Character Development

Meet Herman (Le Mary), who might be close in age to his new wife or, more likely given the realities of medieval wedlock, no spring chicken as compared to her tender “eighteen years and not a day older” (*elle a xviii ans et non plus* [ATF, 1: 2]). Either way, especially considering one of Phil’s warnings about cuckoldry, it is comedy-friendly to envisage him as older—perhaps *much* older—than his bride and younger—perhaps *much* younger—than his wizened advisor, Doc Phil, of fifty or sixty years. That said, one might cast Herman and Phil as near peers, both “men of a certain age.” The possibility of a more geezer-like Herman seems more unlikely, however, when we take stock of Mary Hartman’s exquisite work on the realities of medieval marriage. Although most medieval women and men “married comparatively late,” she writes of Northern France, they were “much closer in age than their counterparts in early-marriage societies” (6). But a man’s first bride at age fifty? Could Herman be that pathetic? Even in farce, probably not. I therefore suggest that he be imagined as twenty to thirty years old. If you prefer to conceive him as an old fart, feel free to make revisions to moments in my translation at which Phil calls Herman, “pal,” “son,” or “kid.”

Herman is prissy, foppish, and definitely anal. Upon arriving at the law offices, he might even brandish a scroll that exhibits the lengthy list of questions that he has painstakingly compiled after only a single day of marriage.⁶ Linguistically speaking, he also sounds older than his years. Pretty-boy Herman is polite and downright flowery (compare him to the ironically named Allcock in our next play). Using the formal *vous* throughout, he addresses his advisor as *Monseigneur* or *Sire*, trying way too hard to sound clever and elegant. And, *gosh darn it*, he certainly has no wish to take the name of the Lord in vain. We do see another linguistic side of him, though, when he speaks to the audience.

And who exactly is Le Docteur? The sadder but wiser attorney is not averse to dispensing medical advice, even though it seems clear that he is no

physician. Think of him as someone who holds a PhD from East Podunk University, someone akin to Professor Pylon of our #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, who likes to pile it higher and deeper, someone who insists on being addressed as “Doctor” (which title would accrue benefits today only when he makes dinner reservations). He is a self-help guru, a life coach, and a shameless self-marketer: the medieval equivalent of a corporate shill hawking his own books about the “life code” needed for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Whence my choice of the updated, parodic name “Doc Phil.” Meanwhile, it is clear from his Basochial approach to the issues that his own life code is “Those who can’t do teach, and those who can’t teach sue.” Indeed, Faivre recalls that he is a very particular kind of medieval French attorney who is an expert in both civil and canon law (*Répertoire*, 114). Imagine a single practitioner who would be able to negotiate your prenup, send you to the right locksmith, settle your divorce, and get you an annulment—or, if need be, a papal dispensation. Doc Phil does it all. And yet, in doing it all, he seems endlessly unhappy and preoccupied. Phil presents as absent-minded and distracted by his years of real experience with pain and suffering. This is all too clear in his closing lamentations devoted to hard lessons learned. In contrast to the prissy Newlywed, everything about Phil suggests frankness and—holy filet of fuck!—vulgarity. He is much more informal throughout, addressing his interlocutor with *tu*, a sign either of disrespect or of the large difference in age . . . or both. Since Doc Phil has a potty mouth, I’ve scripted him in an uninhibited vernacular; but this might readily be adjusted in performance.

Last but not least, the unnamed Wife has no lines and is not listed in the French cast; but she is depicted so vividly that, to my mind, the dialogue itself constitutes a kind of stage direction, an invitation to animate her by means of mime. The entire conversation between the two men has a flashback quality, such that there is ample reason to feature an actress in this silent role.

Likewise for the individuals who are obviously the intended audience of the play’s many in-jokes and of its teacher–student ambiance: late medieval male law students, the Basochiens. I recommend that some be imagined as plants in the audience (below, § “Sets and Staging”).

Language

With several refrain-like structures reminiscent of the lyric debate genre known as the *tenso* or *jeu parti*, *The Newlywed Game* plays, to my ear, as an almost sung conversation, as variations on a theme. It is a dialogue in the tra-

dition of some of the earliest musicodramatic offerings of medieval France, such as Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion*.⁷ In a poetic atmosphere not dissimilar to Lewis Carroll's "You are old, Father William," Herman repeatedly asks two key questions that undergird the plot, both having to do with the regulation of marital behavior, his own and his wife's. The first question appears in various guises and is not always so straightforward to translate: *Comment je me doy gouverner?* (1: 2). On one hand, it signifies "How should I behave/comport *myself*?" On the other hand, since both the reflexive and nonreflexive forms of the verb are used interchangeably—*gouverner* and *se gouverner*—the phrase might also connote Herman's query about how he might govern, rule, or discipline his wife. In essence, he is inquiring simultaneously—and at a loss to answer—"How should *I* behave?" and "How do I get *her* to behave?" Is his primary need to control her or to control himself? How readers and performers answer those questions will determine Herman's character; it will also determine the comic or tragic tone of the production.

Herman's second question concerns what in the world to do in general. For that, I've opted for variations on a repeated musical phrase. If sung in performance, it requires the clearance of permissions related to Irving Berlin's "What'll I Do?"⁸ (*Dictes-moy, sire, que feray; or Adoncques que pourray-je faire?* [1: 3]). Any number of sung refrains would work well, including an updated song or original music to either of these substitute translations: "And then what?" or, in keeping with the lawyerly tone of the play, "Is there no order in this court?"

Sets and Staging

The set is clearly the office of Doc Phil, but another set can be intuited: the newlywed couple's less-than-happy home. For reasons that will soon become clear, it could be very funny to stage *The Newlywed Game* before #5, *The Jack-ass Conjecture*.

As I intimated above, there is plenty of room for comic excess throughout the play once we make room for the rich possibilities for mime. The fact of the matter is that Herman's maniacal enumeration of the events at his marital abode is so detailed that it functions as a veritable script for flashback scenes. What he describes sounds considerably more than hypothetical. Once we imagine the Wife as a living, breathing character in the cast, once two actors mime—before the audience's very eyes—the wedding night, the tantrums,

the drinking . . . believe me when I tell you that, even an unmimed read-through *chez moi* rendered *The Newlywed Game* one of the most entertaining plays of “*Holy Deadlock*” and *Further Ribaldries*. For example, one might easily imagine an opening pantomime à la *Philadelphia Story*, or a wedding night that was not the earth-shattering success it should have been. The possibilities for updated staging are delectable, such as Herman mandating a punitive “time-out” for the unnamed Wife. At other moments, medieval law students in attendance might be watching the action onstage or from the audience, frantically taking notes, yawning, drinking. Others might even be waiting in line for a consultation. Male lawyers of yesteryear, moreover, might morph into their coed descendants of today.

Finally, the presence of mime would allow for an inflected, progressive, politicized performance of the play as a parable—or a parody—of straight or gay marriage. It could be very funny to stage it—or double-stage it—as two cross-cast performances, one after the other. Imagine that Herman’s “wife” is a man; or imagine Herman as Hermione or “Hermie,” who has just wed another woman. In a word, this play has the potential to be a bona fide, contemporary political blast.

Costumes and Props

Doc Phil’s messy office is littered with piles upon piles of papers, law books, bottles of liquor or other pick-me-ups, discarded garbage of all kinds that has never made it to a waste receptacle. Herman might arrive armed with a scroll or a day planner and be sporting an enormous codpiece, the better to camouflage his meager assets. If a set is designed for the newlyweds’ home, it should boast an impressive wine cellar.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

“Ya Got Trouble.” By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 550000489.

“What’ll I Do?” By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 2852023.

“Treat Her Right.” By Roy Head and Gene Kurtz. BMI Work #1542510.

“Mama Said.” By Willie Denson and Luther Dixon. BMI Work #269863.

“How Will I Know if She Really Loves Me?” By George Robert Merrill, Shannon Rubicam, and N. W. Walden. BMI Work #595240.

“Mustang Sally.” By Bonny Rice. BMI Work #1026286.

“Lover’s Cross.” By James J. Croce. ASCAP Work ID: 420179604.

“All My Trials.” By Joan Baez. ASCAP Work ID: 310153330.

“The Party’s Over.” By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne.

ASCAP Work ID: 460012557.

“Martyr [for Love].” By Martin Lee Gore. BMI Work #7760075.

“What’d I Say.” By Ray Charles. BMI Work #1631628.

“Why Can’t You Behave?” By Cole Porter. ASCAP Work ID: 530082769.

[Possible opening music]⁸

[Scene 1]

[At the home of the newlyweds, a mimed scene might depict “a day in the life,” including what happened on the wedding night. The two actors might also mime the very excesses soon to be discussed: rage, jealousy, alcohol, and sex. At the conclusion of the pantomimes, Herman leaves his home and heads to the office of Doc Phil. On the way, he has further opportunities for mime.]

The NEWLYWED HUSBAND, HERMAN, begins

[As he addresses the audience, he becomes more and more anxious.] It’s true, folks: I really thought I wanted to be married. Thought it would make me happy, do a body good. So here I am, married and, God willing, it’ll all work out. But, to be perfectly honest, I’ve got a sinking feeling I’m gonna be sorry. And that’s why . . . [to hell with the self-help books!] I need an expert! A lawyer! Somebody who talks as good a game as he writes.⁹ A bulldog in court who’s no stranger to bull. . . . A scholar, like you folks—maybe even with a PhD—because all I can say about my case is: it’s an emergency. My life is on the line. I need a medicine man. A love doctor. A life coach. And maybe *he* can tell me what I’ve gotta do to pull off a marriage because . . . I’m going to have to concentrate: I just don’t get the married state.¹⁰

I’m not quite sure what he can tell me, but I do know this: it turns out you get more trouble in one single day than a man oughta get in a week.

He leaves for the Doctor’s.

[Scene 2]

[The law office should look as Dickensian as possible. Phil is buried under mountains of paper; he has difficulty finding his material and seems thoroughly scatterbrained. Herman might even have some trouble seeing exactly where the practitioner is.]

HERMAN

God give you good day, Counselor. [*{With a wink at the audience}*] And what's up, doc?]

I've come before you today on a matter of some urgency, if you'd be good enough to give me some direction. I need some advice about the state of holy wedlock. How, pray tell, am I to behave? How do I get a marriage right?

[*Reaching into his pockets*] Not to worry, good sir, I can certainly make it worth your while. Here you are: I've got four hundred dollars right here for your trouble.¹¹

[A silence ensues and possibly more mime. Has the good doc heard him or is he simply waiting for more money?]

The DOCTOR, DOC PHIL

Yeah, yeah, yeah, God give you good day. Right back atcha, pal. I heard you the first time. But some of us gents think before we speak, ya know?

[*Phil's the name and advice is my game.*] So go on: if you want some, I'll need the whole story. The truth, the whole truth, and nothin' but the truth. Dude. Come on, let's have it.

HERMAN

Happy to oblige, sir. I married her yesterday morning at the convent where we first met. We just had the wedding night.

DOC PHIL

So. . . ? Spill. Is she pretty? How old might she be, I wonder.

HERMAN

For your information, sir, she's eighteen if she's a day.

DOC PHIL

Better watch out before she makes a cuckold outta you. [*Looking him over*] Unless you're some kinda genius or somethin'. [*The Newlywed waits politely.*]

Come on, kid, spit it out: what kind of advice do you need exactly?

HERMAN

If it please the court, sir, first I'd be inquiring as to how to comport myself when it comes to. . . . How do I run things at home during this first very long week?

DOC PHIL

Well, lemme tell you, it's gonna be rough. But here's what you do. You're gonna keep 'er real close and break 'er in gently. Easy does it till she learns the ropes.

HERMAN

But Doctor Phil, what about the rest of the year?

[It's hard. Who knew?] What'll I do?^{®12}

DOC PHIL

Just listen up, and do like I tell you. Take it easy, boy, 'cause you're gonna have to put up with a lot. [*He makes the sign of the cross.*] God knows you'll need the patience of a saint.

HERMAN

O great and powerful doctor—no mere ABD—I'm afraid she might have a temper and that she's, shall we say, a bit on the jealous side.

[If she's a shrew], what'll I do?[®]

DOC PHIL

Tell me about it, stud! If she's jealous for cause, then, basically, you're screwed. Oh, you got trouble![®] Remember [*with an equivocal sexual gesture*]: Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword, and ain't that the gospel truth! So you better get it through your head right now. [Or better yet, buy my book, *Life Code*, on sale now at a bookstore near you!]¹³

HERMAN

I give you my word of honor, sir. I'll never give her cause to be jealous of anything on my account . . . unless, of course, she's totally wrong about it.

DOC PHIL

Next up, I'm gonna do you a big favor here and teach you all about the ins and outs of discipline. First up, there's the stick—the rule of the rod; or, you could maybe try talkin' to her. Your school, your rules. You just gotta figure out which method works best for you.

HERMAN

But I'd never want to hit her! I'd like to treat her right,[©] gentle as I know how, in word and deed alike.

DOC PHIL

Uh-huh. Okay. See you in court, pal, 'cause that's exactly where you're gonna be till the day you die. I know your kind [*under his breath*] first-hand. So take it from me: if your wife gets jealous o' you without cause, then *you* are gonna pretend to be jealous of *her*. The performance of a lifetime.¹⁴ If you so much as *see* her talking to another man, go crazy jealous! Throw a hissy fit! She'll soon see the error of her ways and that jealousy o' hers will be history.

HERMAN

Heavens to Betsy! That's an excellent idea! Right you are, sir! But, if I might also inquire . . . there's the matter of. . . What if . . . she goes a bit overboard on the food and drink? Or can't control her appetites? Let's say she's hitting the sauce? Or if I should happen to catch her in the act of . . . drinking . . . say, morning, noon, and night?
[What then, pray tell?] What'll I do?[©]

DOC PHIL

Okey-dokey, pal, I've got your answer right here:
[*"Here" might be the bottle of liquor in a desk drawer that Phil has no trouble finding.*]

There are three kinds o' drunk, and they're the bane of a man's existence. The first kind is your classic mean drunk, always flyin' off the

handle; the second's all happy and gay; and the third is always fallin' asleep. And that's why I'm tellin' you straight up: you've gotta know the different remedies. So you better make damn sure you hang onto the keys to that wine cellar! That's your best line o' defense, best bet, really. And, if your wife's really on your case for somethin' to drink, then forget it! Just give her a drink o' water. And, if somehow, that cup o' hers still runneth over—let's say, she winds up dead drunk—then you send her right to bed. And, if she tries to make a scene or somethin', then you just beat it. But take my advice, buddy: Do not—I repeat, do *not*—get in her face because—and this is the God's honest truth—alcoholism is no joke. It's an epidemic, sweepin' the whole country, I tell you. There's no cure. [One day at a time. May God grant you the strength to change the things you can. . . .]

HERMAN

And, do tell me, good sir: what if my wife is . . . a bitch? What if Mary, Mary, quite contrary always wants to pick a fight?
[It's all so new.] What'll I do?®

DOC PHIL

Remember the immortal words o' Cato! He had him a nice thing or two to say about the ladies. If she's—what do they say?—without blame—then just put up with her. Just grin and bear it. [*With an ob-scene gesture*] Or grin and *bare* it!

HERMAN

And what if she were to happen to . . . break her marriage vows? If you could share your great wisdom sir, please tell me: Do I leave town? Do I send her back to her father?
[Or see it through?] What'll I do?®

DOC PHIL

Take my advice, pal, because this is what I learned from my mama: You're gonna swear up and down on a stack o' Bibles that your wife's the finest creation on the face o' this earth and that—[Mama said, mama said!®]—when God made her, he threw away the mold. Wanna keep your reputation intact? Don't give her no trouble; you'll get no trouble from her. And if anybody should wanna bad-mouth her, then

he's your sworn enemy to the death, you hear? Or worse. Deny early and often. And that, my friend, is how you keep her quiet.

HERMAN

And what about . . . I'm a bit reluctant to bring this up in mixed company but—gosh darn it!—I don't know how to put it . . . If you wouldn't mind . . . if you could see your way clear . . . I'd feel ever so much better if you could just . . . give me your best advice, about . . . you know, doc, intimacy. When we're in bed. Naked.

[I need a clue.] What'll I do?¹⁵

DOC PHIL

Dude. Good thought. I get it, you wanna be a regular Renaissance man. Okey-dokey, then, first off: when you're ready for bed, you gotta let the wife get there first. Next, you gotta be sure you're face to face. Look 'er right in the eye. The whole time. Men on top. Sometimes you hear about a man turnin' his back on his own wife. Or flippin' 'er over! It's an abomination! And, unless you're a natural born fool, you oughta be able to tell whether your wife's in the mood. It's obvious. You just better make damn sure the little lady's got no cause to complain about you.¹⁶ Keep your end up, son, or you'll never live it down!

HERMAN

But, sir, if you could talk to me just a bit more about. . . . How on earth can I tell if my wife is "into me," if you will, or whether she can't stand the sight of me?

[Don't know, it's true.] What'll I do?[©]

DOC PHIL

And that's the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. All I can tell you is what I know and you can take it to the bank: [How will you know if she really loves you?[©]]

Dude. The first thing you gotta do is figure out what the hell she likes. [*Throughout these remarks, Phil becomes increasingly annoyed at Herman's obtuseness.*] What turns her on, what she's into. And, then, here's what you're gonna do: you'll make a point of ordering her to do the exact opposite, you know, the better to please your ass.¹⁷ Now: if she

ain't scared o' you—if she really, truly loves you—then, she'll do it! She'll obey. And, if not, she'll do whatever she damn well pleases. Count on it.

HERMAN

But, I have no idea what she likes. I don't know what to do to please her . . . to get her to want me . . . or love me. I'm not tryin' to make a federal case or anything. All I want is to live happily after. No drama.

DOC PHIL

Drama, you say? Listen, when a husband is displeased and beats his wife, she don't like it.¹⁸ But when she's got one always fallin' all over her, she don't like that either. She gets bored. So I'll have you know—would you pay attention here?—love without fear ain't worth a thing. Face the music, kiddo: when you love someone, you're afraid of upsetting the other party. You wouldn't dream of it. Not on your life. Love means never having to say you're sorry. And that's why, take it from me, kid: speak softly and carry a big stick. Not too hard. Not too soft. Just right. Find the happy medium. Unless—[*with a wink to the audience*] there's always a loophole, right?—she gives you a good reason not to. But you might as well know: sometimes, you're just gonna have to zip it. To keep the peace. [*He eyes Herman's codpiece.*] Don't sweat the small stuff.

[*Doc Phil daydreams distractedly for a time, perhaps picturing his own sex advice.*]

HERMAN

But imagine she's not scared of me at all. What then?
[Dude, that's your cue.] What'll I do?®

DOC PHIL

What can I tell you? You got your work cut out for you there, pal. Just remember: Whatever you do, it's men on top or you'll never hear the end of it! You ride that filly Western style—ya hear?—otherwise you got it ass-backwards. Here's the thing: if husbands were horses, then women would ride. And you can't have *her* mountin' *you* because, once *she's* in the saddle, she's really gonna dig in 'er heels and it's ride, Sally, ride!® That's right: they start you off at nice slow trot and, next thing you know, they're outta the gate! First a canter, then a full gallop, and

then giddy-up horsey! Ride 'im, cowgirl! She'll run you ragged! Turn your whole world upside down! You rear your head, she got the spurs gonna show you who's boss.
Now, I know you jokers got your own ways o' doin' things these days, but get your ass back in the saddle, boy! Next thing you know, menfolk be ridin' sidesaddle. When donkeys fly!

HERMAN

[Is this going to be on the test? And, speaking of donkeys: look at all those students out there! Maybe there's a jackass or two wants to pick up a copy of our play.] So go ahead: plug your book. All this advice you're giving me: Is it written down somewhere?

DOC PHIL

[What do you want? A goddamn PowerPoint presentation?] I was just fixin' to tell you:
I'm an oral-tradition kinda guy myself, learned it all in the school o' hard knocks. [But, some folks need it all written down for 'em;] so everything I've learned over the years has all gone into that book. When you go into the law, you think it's gonna be all civil cases, torts, small claims, lawsuits against the Church . . . but—hell!—it's all marriage all the time. It's all I do. I don't have any fun anymore. I'm all sad and distracted and down in the dumps. I'm mainly depressed, just tryin' to figure out how I'm ever gonna get out of it.¹⁹ As for you, if you decide to be patient in marriage and take it all in stride, then all you're gonna get is pain and suffering. You'll be a damn martyr just like San Lorenzo, the one they roasted on a spit. But take my word for it: Put lipstick on a pig and it's still a pig.

HERMAN

I understand. I can see very well that I'll have to make the sacrifice. I'm married now: so I'll have to give it all up, body and soul, for the trials and tribulations of holy wedlock. God, give me strength! and the courage to endure all the pain and suffering. That's right: Hang me right up on that lover's cross.[©] All my trials, Lord, soon be over[©] and . . . for that matter, folks, so is the show!

That's it folks: That's the end. The party's over![©]

If you thought we were crass, what can we say?
Bye-bye for now. We hope you liked the play!

[*Possible closing music*]²⁰

The END

Here ends the Advice to the Newlywed
first published at the Press of
Barnabé Chaussard
near Our Lady of Solace.
In 1547.

2.

The Shithouse

Le Retraict

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The HUSBAND (Le Mary)

KITTY, the WIFE (La Femme)

WILLY, the Valet (Guillot)

SIR ALLCOCK, the LOVER (L'Amoureux, Monsieur Lacoque)

[A Neighbor Lady, the Husband's Mistress]

[The Cat]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The anonymous *Farce nouvelle et fort joyeuse à quatre personnages, c'est asçavoir le Retraict*, appears as #54 in the *Recueil La Vallière*. It is the thirteenth and final play of Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, *RFMSJ*, vol. 3. (As noted in “About This Translation,” the editors did not provide verse numbers, and the plays are not paginated continuously throughout any given volume. Thus, when referencing *The Shithouse*, I cite from *RFMSJ* by volume and [local] page number only.) *Le Retrait* was also edited by Mabilie, *CFSM*, 2: 145–85; and by Tissier, as #3 of *RF*, 1: 177–242. Its plot is described in Faivre, *Répertoire*, #150 (384–86); and in Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #183 (228–29). The play was also translated into modern French by Tissier as #3 of *FFMA*, 1: 49–69; by Faivre in his bilingual Middle French–Modern French edition of *Les Farces*, 1: 325–96; and by Galheto, Bastos, and Ribeiro into modern Portuguese (*A Retrete*). To my knowledge, there is no English translation. In the Tissier edition, the play is 488 verses, mostly rhyming octosyllabic couplets. By Petit de Julleville's calculation, it is 485 verses. Alternate title: *It's Potty Time!*

An unnamed Everywoman, whom I call Kitty, is long overdue for an adulterous rendezvous with her Lover, whom I christen, with full comic irony, Sir Allcock (below, § “Characters and Character Development”). Her husband, also unnamed, is away, which has advantages and disadvantages. Unfortunately for Kitty, she must enlist the assistance of the couple’s seemingly numbskull valet to watch the door; and anything and everything related to Willy requires much conflict and negotiation. When Sir Allcock arrives with a lovely picnic of stuffed partridge, he has conflicts of his own to negotiate, the central one within himself. Of two competing objects of desire, which shall trump the other: food or sex? Consumption or consummation? Kitty favors the latter of both pairs; but, before much of either can be accomplished, the Husband returns. *Mais, bien sûr*.

At Kitty’s urging, Sir Allcock takes cover in the most ignominious spot of all: the privy or, as we Americans say in a euphemism that has long amused the French, the bathroom. He submerges his head (and maybe more of his person) in the toilet, lest he emit any of the natural sounds induced by such surroundings. (This is not exactly the hole that Kitty had in mind but, as Marie-Christine Pouchelle alerts us, “faeces and the female genitals are intimately associated in the secrecy which covers both: ‘secret place of nature’ was used to mean latrine, while ‘secret places of women’ means the female reproductive organs” [*Body and Surgery*, 134]). Shortly thereafter, Allcock gives himself away by—what else?—coughing and gagging from the hideous stench. Meanwhile, Kitty’s spouse is a *gourmand* who has gorged himself on Allcock’s picnic, which in turn prompts an intestinal distress so dramatic that it necessitates an urgent run to the privy. This leads to a denouement at the toilet that incarnates less the literal “unknotting” of the plot and more the physical unknotting of the poor Husband’s bowels. Willy fakes an analogous affliction so that he can come along. At least we *think* he’s faking it. What, then, is Allcock to do? Will his whole body fit into the medieval crapper?

Fearful at the prospect of imminent discovery, a naked (or, in a pinch, half-naked) Allcock flees the filthy scene, undoubtedly leaving a material trail of shit behind him. Since the excremental residue endures on his body, he is so frightful to behold that the Husband mistakes him for the Devil (*amoureux du diable*). That’s right: it’s a love-devil, a devil-in-love. Why, it’s a damn shit-demon, for whom a terrific model appears in the 1999 film *Dogma*. Or, if you prefer something a little less anachronistic, take a gander at Figure 1,



Figure 1. The Devil in the latrine. From Harington, *New Discourse of a Stale Subject*, 17. Library of the British Museum.

in which the Devil emerges, splendiferously stenchily, in the latrine of Sir John Harington's *New Discourse of a Stale Subject*.¹ Indeed, of the four characters of our play, only the Husband is in the dark, his head up his ass as he experiences the metaphorical version of the "crappy depths" to which the shit-faced Lover has plunged. Far and away the biggest jokes are on the terrified Husband, whose assumption about the Devil is no less logical for his being scared shitless. In the world of medieval theater, the carnally inclined Devil—like the disrobed Allcock—was often represented in the nude. The coup de grâce is this: by dint of its hint that the Devil is easily conjurable, *The Shithouse* wreaks comic havoc upon one of the more serious threads of medieval urban legendry. Popular belief had it that the Devil was given to mak-

ing unexpected appearances at the theater, as in such plays as *Doctor Faustus* (DBD, chap. 8; Cox, *Devil and the Sacred*, 124–26). There is always a dark side to the Devil in the flesh of drama (below, § “Sets and Staging”).

In the end, Willy explains that his master is being punished for being jealous and possessive of his wife—Kitty mentions this in her first speech—so, henceforth, the Husband promises to be a better man. As for Willy, his incessant bartering leaves him happier, wealthier, and more sated, at least until the next time.

Faivre was impressed. Although admitting to finding most farcical endings deficient, he dubs the grand finale of *The Shithouse* a masterpiece (*Répertoire*, 386). It's true. Much is worthy of critical notice in this marvelous play, which brings together multiple strands from multiple farces. It resembles *Shit for Brains* (FF, #8) with its scatology; and it resembles *Cooch E. Whippet* (FF, #11) with its opening amorous violence, devil in disguise, and closing oath of fealty proclaimed by a nasty, jealous husband to his nasty, sex-crazed wife. It would likely have reminded medieval audiences of another farce that makes a mockery of life and death—the *Farce of the Miller*, in which a dying miller is mistaken for a turd on his deathbed (SMFF, 13–67)—just as many of its themes arise in two other chickenshit farces devoted to misadventures in the chicken coop.² There is also a version of this tale in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* (RTC, 229; RF, 1: 183–90). And, it is certainly a worthy companion to Marguerite de Navarre's story of Madame de Roncex from the *Heptameron*, in which a proper lady requires assistance from a group of sleazy monks when she becomes stuck in a revolting outhouse.³ In other words, if there was a common farcical source for the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* and the *Heptameron*, we might opt to call this not *intertextuality* but *intersexuality*. All the more so in that, in *The Shithouse*, plot, character, language, sets, and props are as commingled and organic as the troubled bodies onstage.

Characters and Character Development

The Husband, whose character is evoked long before we ever see him, is the play's singular absent presence and, in that respect, he is rather like the Devil himself. He is a well-to-do businessman—possibly a landlord (RF, 1: 223n)—who has left the residence to collect a debt. (In any event, that is what he has told his wife.) Regardless of the precise nature of his affairs, they do seem to involve a wide range of social intercourse, some of which will lend itself nicely to mime (below, § “Sets and Staging”). He should be on the portly side.

By her own description in the very first line of the play, Kitty is always in a foul mood and we know why. Hers is a classic complaint of wives in farce: no action in the marital bed. Where, oh where, is Allcock? Hardly forthcoming; so, in the interim, she might well have been stuffing herself with alimentary substitutes. While she is described as abstemious and eating like a bird, we all know that birds eat constantly. In point of fact, Kitty seems as gluttonous as her hubby, also diving into Allcock's picnic package. To enhance the comedy, one might cast an overweight actor in the role of Kitty; she could certainly be played as overindulgent in all the vices and all seven of the deadly sins. Or one might portray her as an alcoholic not unlike the bride of #1, *The Newlywed Game*: try sex, booze, and rock 'n' roll. But mostly, she's frustrated. Between Allcock's underzealous advances and Willy's overzealous interventions, what's a girl to do? She has no more luck getting Willy to watch (and shut) the door as she does getting him to watch (and shut) his yap (all part of a favorite farcical double entendre in such a play as the *Edict of Noée* [FF, 89–90, 93–95]). And she needs wine to calm her nerves because Sir Allcock is quite the slow starter. Poor Kitty: the only finished business in this play is “number two,” and she's it. Contrary to what she was expecting, it's potty time. Speaking of which, while she has a bit of a potty mouth when upbraiding her valet, she deploys what small linguistic elegance she can muster when turning her attention to Allcock and even to her husband. Alas, as is the case for so many of her efforts, this too is unsuccessful. When she speaks a little French in this translation, it has an error: *entrez-vous*. But she apparently playacts with great success, delivering one helluva performance by feigning fear of Allcock at the shitty denouement.

Enter the recurring character of the smart-ass servant. A sort of brother in arms to the sleazy Gatekeeper in *Monk-ey Business* (FF, #9), he is part pimp, part gofer, part gatekeeper, and all valet. If Kitty is all the vices rolled into one, then the same could be said about the sleepy but wily Willy's combo of all seven dwarves (Dopey, Sleepy, Sneezy, etc.). A male precursor of sorts to Molière's beloved, sassy, serving-girl soubrette who often speaks directly to the audience, this scene-stealing *soubret* is in the spotlight at pretty much every comic development of the play. Faivre points out that, as compared to the version from the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, *The Shithouse* has been reworked in such a way as to put Willy front and center as the driving force (*Répertoire*, 385). And drive he does. A hard bargain. Although he is not all that competent at his job, it so happens that Willy is very good at bartering and at looking after his own interests, whether alimentary, vestimentary, or fi-

nancial. Motivated throughout by such bare necessities as food, drink, sleep, hats, clothes, money, and horsing around, he seems strangely uninterested in sex, at least when it comes to his Mistress's alleged charms. Or maybe he is *strangely interested* in sex. Willy's insults are especially rude and positively pornographic when Kitty tries flirtation in exchange for his cooperation. His rejection? "May you be beaten naked with a red-hot poker" (*d'un baston rouge comme un fer chault / soyés batue toute nue*) (RFMSJ, 3: 6). The thing about Willy: he is by no means as dumb ass as he looks; he even lapses briefly into bona fide lawyer-speak at the end of the play, clearly a particularly relatable character for any Basochien.

The object of Kitty's affections sports the name of Lacoque but he is referred to throughout by his generic title, the Lover. While it is true that his French name might conjure visions of walking on eggshells—it bears some resemblance to the fragility of a *coquefredouille*, a wretched milksop—I have opted instead for ironic exaggeration, a preferred technique of farce, with something more roosterly. Here, he shall go by Sir Allcock; and he has a bit of trouble with his cock-a-doodle-doo. He is financially well off, well dressed, and oh-so-proud to have what he considers to be a modicum of class. He speaks in flowery, almost effeminate language, with many a poetic flight of fancy. And that, dear Reader, is why I've scripted him in iambic pentameter. I have done so for every single line except the precious few during which he manifests supreme diabolical excitement. Do note that, for this timorous character, that's a grand total of two lines: when he finally gives in to Kitty—actors and readers need to decide how much or how little they do that is of a sexual nature—and when he springs from the privy as the Devil. The bottom line is that he is scarcely "all cock." Far from it, he is utterly panicked at the prospect of being caught in flagrante delicto. In a word, he is so chickenshit that he cannot function without ample quantities of liquor. Sex seems to terrify him; he does not know where it fits in the corporeal hierarchy of indulgence with hunger, thirst, and other functions that afford release. (In point of fact, the only characters in *The Shithouse* who seem to *like* sex are *married*: but not to each other.) In terms of his physique, Allcock belies an aura of near desperation such that, consistent with the other etymologies for "Lacoque," he might bear a physical resemblance to the nineteenth-century romantic hero: pallid, slight, and weak.

Last but, comically speaking, not least: everything that Willy says and does is funnier because of the presence of valet's oft recurring consort. Willy has a cat;⁴ and I suggest that his four-legged friend appear as a bona fide *per-*

sonnage in the play. In lieu of a stuffed animal or a live, trained cat, an actor might be cast in the role of the feline, who might be just as obtrusive, unwelcome, and under foot as Willy (fighting for a piece of roast partridge, nibbling on the extremities of the amorous duo). Casting the Cat also facilitates punning with Kitty (whence my choice of the Wife's name). There's a wonderful Flemish proverb—the Flemings being another European culture that features a comically theatrical Middle Ages—that goes something like this: when the perpetrator of some misdeed or other is on the verge of being caught, he deflects and denies by blaming it on “the Baker's cat.” Willy's cat can be put to the proverbial good use.

Language

Farce is the realm of nonstop wordplay, and *The Shithouse* is no exception, one of its first conflicts targeting language itself. Willy takes great umbrage at Kitty's calling him a *lourdault*, which might be translated any number of ways: a kind of bodily ungainliness—a klutz?—or, in the direction I've taken here, dumb ass, jackass, dolt, hick, dickhead, moron, pea-brain, numbnuts, and so on. Other disobliging epithets fly throughout as the shit hits the fan; but *that* one really gets his goat. (No goats in this anthology: just a jackass in our fifth play.)

Of philological interest elsewhere: as it so often occurs in farce, the characters' speech patterns range from vulgar to highfalutin. When addressing one another, Sir Allcock and Kitty alternate between ridiculously flowery and ridiculously filthy. Willy also mixes registers in such a way as to hint that he might not be quite as dumb as he looks. He is capable of elegant language when he needs to imitate it. The only character with any consistent linguistic elegance is the Husband.

As if to foreshadow the dirtily devilish denouement, a panoply of curses, popular expressions, and idioms allude to . . . *could it be Satan?* When it's not devils, it's wolves (several times over) in the partridge house.⁵ Otherwise, some lines are rife with sacrilege. In addition to the euphemistic *bieu* for *Dieu* (“gosh” to avoid “God”), both Willy and Kitty hurl unusually unvarnished curses: they flat-out say *par Dieu* and, more shockingly, *Jésus!* (3: 9, 10). But it is Willy who utters the most blasphemous reference of all and, if and when the play was performed, it probably got the biggest laugh. When Allcock jumps out from his shithole, Willy intones the Latin prayer *Aspergez me domine*. In the Devil's playground of *The Shithouse*, he means something like:

“Don’t spray your shitty dick at me!” Technically, *aspergès* means “to sprinkle holy water”; plus, if you’ve ever seen a picture of the aspergillum whence the sprinkling comes, the liturgical prop is quite the phallic symbol. Thus, it is not hard to understand its lexical camaraderie with the virile member (*RF*, 1: 236n). Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the priest’s penis as aspergillum, which pops up in other farces.⁶

Several additional tours de force deserve mention, beginning with the rich pick of roast partridge. The partridge doesn’t occupy an English pear tree, but it is all over the colorful wisdom of Middle French proverbs. For example, in Oudin’s *Curiositez*, we find such gems as *les Perdrix y tombent toutes rosties*, “partridges fall to earth fully roasted” (410), which is essentially what happens in Scene 3 of our play. Roughly corresponding to our “shooting fish in a barrel,” the meaning is ironic, connoting “a place where one does not encounter all that one hopes.” Better yet: *faire comme les Perdrix*, “to make like partridges” means “to call attention to the very thing that you seek to hide,” “to be discovered with your ass hanging out” (*ibid.*), or, as in *The Shithouse*, “to be the [literal] butt of the joke.” The better to bring out the alimentary humor, I’ve made several adjustments to the contents of the picnic (below, § “Sets and Staging”), which is, let’s face it, no picnic for Kitty. She needs some gravy for her mashed potatoes[®]; and she is desperate to play “hide the sausage.”

Finally, given all the shit that goes down (and downwind) in this play, it made sense to follow its lead by dirtying up some of the language. The brilliance of Allcock’s potentially shit-laden opening monologue lies in his repetition of the term *fy*. True, *fy* looks very much like “fie,” as in the chorus of “Fie on Goodness”[®] from *Camelot*, “fie! fie! fie! fie! fie!” But, say it enough in Middle French and *fee fee fee fee* starts to sound like the shit that it is. *Maistre Fy Fy*, for instance—“Brownie Brown” of *Cooch E. Whippet*—serves as one of the countless ways in which Wilhelmina calls her husband a shithhead (*FF*, 343). Along those lines, when Allcock is forced to hide in the sordid privy, he is, shall we say, “pissed off.”⁷ But the pun works even better in French, where potty mouth features fecal as opposed to urinary metaphors. I wish I could take credit for this, but the ever clever Faivre saw it first: in Gallic sensibilities, irritated people are not so much “pissed off” as they are in-the-shit “shitted off”: *ils s’emmerdent* (*Répertoire*, 386). Then again, as you shall see in Scene 3, only American sensibilities could channel echoes of *Gone with the Wind* for the combination of Kitty’s frustration, countrification, and the shit and stench that go down and downwind.

Perhaps most striking to the modern reader will be the medieval linkage of sex and shit. Unappetizing though the wordplay is, it's certainly no more so than such pearls of twenty-first-century American slang as "So, we were, like kissin' *and shit*." It all makes sense in a play where rollicking good times are relentlessly connected to appetites and excretion. Tempted though we might be to resist it, the *pièce de résistance* is this: before going to hide in the privy, Allcock invokes the *piteulx delict* to which he'll soon be privy there (3: 20). *Delict* means delight, sexual pleasure, and sin (cf. in flagrante *delicto*); but, here, it's hideous kinky, practically bordering on coprophilia. As if all that weren't disgusting enough, when the Husband must rush off to the crapper at the denouement for the relief of release, his choice of verb for defecating is *esbastre* (3: 32), farce's common linguistic choice for the sex act. In contrast to Willy's feigned intestinal distress, *his* shit is no act. *Merde, alors!*

Sets and Staging

The action takes place at the home of Kitty and her Husband. There should be a small courtyard and a very visible front door or gate; and the property might be landscaped with a shade tree and a fruit tree or two. The interior as well as the outside grounds should bear evidence of domestic tasks to be done: chopping wood, picking fruit, milling, sifting, and so on. The house itself, likely a manor, requires at least two spaces and probably three if we prefer a separate bedroom: a bedroom and a main room used for cooking, dining, and what-have-you; and, of course, the all-important privy. There are two onstage portals, each the source of tremendous anxiety. The main entryway or gate, through which the jealous Husband might appear at any minute, opens onto the street or the courtyard;⁸ and a smaller side door leads to the privy, the focus of the second half of the play. The large dining table is situated between the two doors, ideally center stage in the main room (*Répertoire*, 385); it is a hospitable site for seduction, chases, slapstick, and the like. Somewhere, in an adjoining area or in the living-it-up-room, an inviting-looking bed should be in a place of prominence.

Throughout the play, there is plenty of room for mime: one might stage Willy working, pretending to work, or goofing off. Likewise, the Husband is possibly engaging in activities about which he has *not* informed his wife. Although he is not present in Scene 1, it could be very funny to mime his departure and what precedes it: something to demonstrate why Kitty is so frus-

trated. Since he later alleges that his errand involved collecting payment from a client, the unknown services rendered might also be mimed downstage.

For her own part, Kitty might open with a musical number—a suggestion I make for many of these farces but here, to add depth to her character. She begins *The Shithouse* with a speech akin to the medieval lyric genre of the unhappily married woman (*chanson de mal mariée*);⁹ so a rousing chorus from some country classic or other might do the job nicely. (“Lovesick Blues”[®] comes to mind.) Similarly, choreography might highlight some of Allcock’s more lyrical moments. When he makes his entrance in Scene 2, he initiates a new rhyme scheme in a monologue so lyrical that it is, at a minimum, a poetic set piece. Since it resembles a medieval rondeau, it might well be a song, which could be performed to original music. Alternatively, with its 1-2-3, 1-2-3 stanzas, it could almost be a waltz; and, at 13 lines (if we count Kitty’s completion of his final sentence), it’s just shy of a sonnet. (The original Middle French is included in the corresponding endnote.)

In the picnic scene involving Kitty, Allcock, and third-wheel Willy, the Lover cannot seem to decide what he wishes to eat first: the roast partridge or Kitty. Regardless of which comes first—and why not have the actors hastily alternate gulps of wine or food with gulps of each other?—a partridge leg must disappear. It is probably consumed by Willy, who can steal it at an opportune moment. But the meaning of the fowl’s “leg” and, more particularly, of the sexually charged Middle French thigh (*cuisse*) surely refers to both the partridge leg and Sir Allcock’s “third leg,” as it were (3: 28). Therefore, I’ve recommended adding to the feast an enormous sausage, the better to enable the English intracural pun with “hide the sausage.” Still, no matter how much sausage is consumed, if consummation ensues, it won’t last long because the scene shifts, along with the bowels, to the privy, a locale that is not without its challenges for staging.

Where exactly is the privy and what does it look like? Obviously, we are not in an age of indoor plumbing. But Kitty and her spouse occupy a social position far superior to, say, the two servants of *Blind Man’s Buff* who worry about things like “taking a dump in the woods” (*FF*, 181–82). Rather, the couple of *The Shithouse* inhabits a dwelling that is relatively upscale by late medieval standards. To my way of thinking, the privy should adjoin the main house; and it should share a very thin wall with the main room. (Remember: it is paramount that the Lover be able to hear Kitty and her Husband and, eventually, vice versa.) The privy must be visible to the audience at all times, its “fourth wall” removed, its interior imaginable in a number of ways. One

might envisage a kind of “luxury outhouse” that boasts a bench with his and hers holes. If so, the “his” toilet should be large enough for a man to dive into. Indeed, the final scene plays funnier if Willy and the Husband do battle over the better seat. Or a different sensibility in production could be created by an elevated porta-potty (with that fourth latrine wall removed as well). But there is another possibility that would be consistent with the dark side of farce, which is never far behind.

In late medieval French comedy, sometimes “dark” is merely disgusting, as in our play’s slippage between shitting and fucking. But sometimes, the darkness is societal. Recall one of the sets of the 2011 film *The Help*, where racism was concretized by the adjacent bathroom destined for the “colored help.” Recall too the harrowing scene in *Schindler’s List* (1993) in which a small child interred at Auschwitz saves his life by diving into the excrement under the outhouse bench in order to hide from the Nazis. The comparison is not as anachronistic as it might appear. Troubling though it is to craft wordplay when describing such horrors, that is precisely what mystery plays sometimes did, as when the depths of the anti-Semitic imagination were revealed in such a play as the fifteenth-century *Mystery of the Sacred Host*. In act 2, an infanticidal Christian mother throws her dead baby into the privy, all part of the trials and retribution that she must endure for her *delicts*. Chief among them: she sold a consecrated Host to a Jew who then tortures the Eucharist in the kitchen until it pisses blood.¹⁰ On one hand, what could be more natural than the process by which eating leads to excreting? On the other hand, anti-Semitic legendry is characterized by the same unsettling association between excretion and food preparation that we encounter in Scene 3 of *The Shithouse*. In the farcical shithouse, wordplay revolves around the dual meaning of *mets* or *mais*, a term that denotes both food (an entrée, dish, *entremets*, or course of a meal) and a state (Sir Allcock’s piteous, “shitty state” or *piteulx mais* [3: 30]). How the privy plays—if it plays at all—depends entirely upon what a given company chooses to make, unmake, or remake of the most social and antisocial of medieval media, the theater.

Costumes and Props

Since costume was a big deal for the Basochiens, the play’s presumed authors who especially loved their furry hats (*ROMD*, 134–41), multiple hats should be present onstage. These should be as silly as possible: nightcaps (feathered or retaining unwelcome feathers from a down pillow in poor condition), be-

rets, and, above all, jesters' caps or feathered fools' caps aplenty (*FFMA*, 1: 53), including the famous pointy hat (*chapeau pointu*) of the Enfants-sans-Souci (a wacky subset of the Basoche, albeit one so wacky that Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès doesn't believe it ever existed¹¹). Not to worry. You needn't be certified as a milliner to understand the play; think of it as the fashion equivalent of Monty Python's "Ministry of Silly Walks," only with silly hats.¹² The *bonet pointu* requested by Willy, for instance, might indicate the woman's hat called a *hennin* (3: 9), one of the accouterments of a buffoon, or, anti-Semitically, the pointy hats typically sported by Jews in medieval iconography.

Sir Allcock arrives with a glorious picnic basket that is more fully loaded with goodies than he is: wine, roast partridge with gravy, mashed potatoes, an extremely large sausage. Do add any and all food items that permit obscene punning, such as bananas, zucchinis, and what have you. You get the picture, and—I guarantee it—so did the medieval audience.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

"Gravy for My Mashed Potatoes." By David Appell and Kal Mann. ASCAP Work ID: 370065920.

"Fie on Goodness." By Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe. ASCAP Work ID: 360020013.

"Lovesick Blues." By Cliff Friend and Irving Mills. ASCAP Work ID: 420097327.

"Alouette." Traditional.

"Auprès de ma blonde." Traditional.

"Raspberry Beret." By Prince. ASCAP Work ID: 80187626.

"Rock-a-bye Baby." Traditional.

"How Long." By J. D. Souther. ASCAP Work ID: 380147279.

"That'll Be the Day." By Jerry Allison, Buddy Holly, and Norman Petty. BMI Work #1478417.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." Traditional.

"Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." Traditional.

"Where You Lead." By Carole King and Toni Kathrin Stern. ASCAP Work ID: 530170824.

"Ride Like the Wind." By Christopher Cross. ASCAP Work ID: 480144485.

"Walk This Way." By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.

“Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen.” Papageno’s aria from *The Magic Flute*. By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1791).
“I Got You Babe.” By Sonny Bono. BMI Work #625872.
“The Best of My Love.” By Glenn Frey, Don Henley, and J. D. Souther. ASCAP Work ID: 320186303.
“The Old Gray Mare.” Traditional.
“You’ll Never Walk Alone.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 550036469.
“Erlkönig.” By Franz Schubert (1815).
“They’re Coming to Take Me Away, Ha-Ha.” By Jerry Samuels. ASCAP Work ID: 500221503.
“Shambala.” By Daniel Moore. BMI Work #1319243.
“Sympathy for the Devil.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richard. BMI Work #144456.

[Scene 1]

[At the home of Kitty and her Husband]

[The action might begin with a pantomime in which the Husband prepares to take his leave from Kitty, both characters miming whatever it is they claim they need to do, each planning on doing something else of a sexual nature. Willy is outside napping.]

Kitty begins.

[She might open with a song. Throughout the scene, she could be nibbling flatulence-inducing food in order to sublimate her sexual frustration.]

KITTY, The WIFE

Seriously? No wonder I’m always pissed off. What is it people say when they’re acting? Oh yeah: [*histrionically*] “Woe is me!” That’s it. And I got every right to complain, if I do say so myself. [So, I’m gonna let you folks in on it:]¹³ The husband’s got me on a real tight leash. Never lets up. Don’t get no release. Plus, as far as recreation goes, he’s got nothin’, if you catch my drift. That’s how come I’m always cursing the month, the day—hell!—the goddamn hour I was born!

I'm a girl with a healthy appetite, but you think he does a thing for me? No way, take my word for it. And that's why—you'll see—I'm gonna turn the tables on him but good. And, by God, he won't suspect a thing!

That's right. I found me an object o' my affections. A real good-lookin' guy and, if you must know, I love him. There. I said it. And I'm gonna give *him* everything he needs or die trying.

If only that husband o' mine would get lost already! [If I could just wish him into the cornfields,] I could finally get it on.

[The Husband departs, poking a sleeping Willy on his way, after which Willy falls asleep again until awakened by a noise or by his cat. Willy gets up and begins to amuse himself with his feathered nightcap, playfully taking it on and off and ultimately leaving it on.]

WILLY, *the Valet, singing [and plucking feathers]*

Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je te plumerai!®

Whoa-ho-ho! The farmer's daughter!

Whoa-ho-ho! And whaddaya know!

KITTY

Jesus H. Christ! What are *you* singin' about? Get over here, Willy!

[Willy is otherwise occupied with whatever piece of stage business amuses the company, but he eventually approaches.]

WILLY

What can I do for you, ma'am?

KITTY

I've got enough trouble around here as it is and you're not even. . . .

Take your time, why don'tcha? It's not like you're. . . .

WILLY

Not like I'm what?

KITTY

Oh what's the point? It just goes in one ear and out the other!

WILLY

It's not like I'm much of a . . . pimp? That's what *Madame* was gonna say, right?

KITTY

[*With an overenthusiastic display of false modesty*] My word! Do watch your language. Of course not! Fiddle-dee-dee. He cracks me up!

WILLY, *singing [playing again with his hat]*

[*Auprès de ma blonde, il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon. . .*][©]

Tra-la-la-la-la! Hey, hey, hey, hey!

Tra-la-la! A raspberry beret![©]

KITTY

Quit singing and listen to me.

WILLY, *singing [as he continues to scratch]*

Doodle-ee-do!

Dewdlee-doo!

Doo-doo-doodly-dew,

Mountain dew!

KITTY

Get your ass over here now, Willy! [*She pauses to observe his disgusting behavior.*] Don't tell me you got lice again. [*Roaches in your ears?*]¹⁴

And you got no manners at all! You don't even tip your. . . What *is* that ridiculous thing on your head?¹⁵ You been sleepin' on the job again?

WILLY

Rock-a-bye baby,[©]

Hear the birdies sing!

Sleep tight, baby, rock yourself to sleep.[©]

This? You mean my nightcap? [*He continues to scratch all over, possibly removing lice.*] It's kinda tight. Kinda itchy here on my noggin. Kinda rough for a nap.

KITTY

Really swell to have around the house.

If only I could count on you for just the teensiest bit of discretion, I'd let you in on a little secret o' mine but. . . Good God, you're a dumb ass!¹⁶

WILLY

Oh yeah? Well, that'll be the day-ay-ay that you die![®] Stripped and whipped naked, bitch!¹⁷ "Dumb ass," is it?

KITTY

You got that right, dumb ass! In the whole wide world, there's no dumber dumb ass than you! You're the dumbest of them all!

WILLY

Again, with the "dumb ass"!

KITTY

Just listen for a second: If you could help a girl out, I could really make it worth your while . . . and then some. You'll never want for anything.

WILLY

You called me a dumb ass! Boy, oh boy, you'll soon be singin' a different tune!¹⁸

KITTY

Come, come now, Willy, let's just forget all that. You can't still be mad, can you? Now get your ass over here!

Okay, here's the thing: as you know, my husband's gone off into the fields . . . to hear the little birdies sing [or whatever]. He's not due back again today. On the other hand, my "friend" is way overdue. He's been a long time comin' and it's high time I get him into bed.

[*Seductively*] You can have anything you want if you watch the door.

WILLY

Watch the door? The hell you say! I'm gonna knock myself out keepin' an eye on things so you can call me a big ol' dumb ass again? Forget it, lady. And shut up!

KITTY

Come, come now, Willy, give a girl a break. Okay, so maybe I called you a couple o' bad names. Forgive me. I'll never call you a dumb ass again. I promise. Put 'er there. Let's shake on it.

WILLY

Bless you, Father, for you did sin! That was a really mean thing to say to me. "Dumb ass!"

KITTY

As God is my witness, Willy, I was just joking around. This *is* a farce, you know.

WILLY

Okay, so you can call me "honey"¹⁹ instead o' "dumb ass."

KITTY

Whatever you say. Now, if we could just get past this and not talk about it any more. Just a little slip o' the tongue was all. I admit it.

WILLY

Yeah, well even a saint woulda gotten pissed at bein' called such a mean name. Don't you never call me that again!

KITTY

No, no. I'd rather die.
So, now then, Willy: Go and keep an eye on the door, would you?
Willy?

WILLY

What for?

KITTY

Jesus! Don't you get it already? A bit of a dumb bunny of a honey, aren't you?

WILLY

Oh! I get it! You're expectin' company. Your "friend's" comin'.

KITTY

By George, I think he's got it!

WILLY

I got it? More like you're gonna get it. [*To the audience as well*] Right up the ass!

KITTY

Keep your voice down! And watch your language!

WILLY

What do I get if I do?

KITTY

Just spit it out already: What's it gonna take?

WILLY

Gimme a new *chapeau*.²⁰ Then I'll watch the door.

[*Kitty rummages through the house looking until she finds something.*]

KITTY

Here you go. This oughta do. Happy now?

WILLY

Holy cow, you betcha! Jesus! I'll be a sight for sore eyes!

KITTY

Now, if the master should happen by, do not—I repeat, do *not*—open up for him unless you give us fair warning. You hear me?

WILLY

Okey-dokey, then. I'll hold down the fort! Won't let the cat outta the bag. When the cat's away. . . .²¹ [Here, Kitty, Kitty!]

[Willy exits to play with his cat and wait by the door.]

[Scene 2]

[In the street]

Enter the Lover.

[On his way to see his mistress, he is carrying a large picnic of roasted partridge with gravy, mashed potatoes, sausage, wine, and so on. He stops to talk, sing, or dance as histrionically as possible.]

The LOVER, Sir ALLCOCK

The Devil take the man who seeks not pleasure!
The Devil take his wealth, silver, and gold!
Be still, my heart and grief that knows no measure!
The Devil take the man who seeks not pleasure!
I yearn . . . I need a pastime for to treasure,
To banish pain and melancholy cold.
The Devil take the man who seeks not pleasure!
The Devil take his wealth, silver, and gold!
I've got to see my *belle dame*. Must be bold.
In her, hope springs eternal. She's my joy.
Under her rule, I do all that I'm told.
That's just the way it is. . . .²²

KITTY

Where is that boy? Are there no tidings? No comfort and joy?[©]
Willy! See anything out there yet? There's nobody comin'?

WILLY

Ready or not, here he comes! Them walls come a-tumblin' down![©] [So gird your loins! Here comes that battering ram!]²³

[*Allcock stops at the gate, endeavoring to determine whether the Husband is at home and then seeking entry.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

Hello! Hello!

WILLY

Who goes there?

You're makin' one helluva racket. What the heck is it? Whaddaya want?

Sir ALLCOCK

'Tis I! I seek the mistress of the house.

WILLY

Begging your pardon, *Monsieur*, but I regret to inform you that the lady is not here within.

Sir ALLCOCK

And where's the master?

WILLY

He *is* within . . . [*under his breath*] somebody else. Cookin' somethin' up with one of the neighbor ladies.

KITTY

Quit foolin' around, Willy, and open up! It's my friend, Sir Allcock. Show him in.

WILLY

Soon as I know he didn't show up empty-handed. The valet's supposed to get a little somethin', you know, to wet his whistle.

[*Kitty goes to the door herself, where a physical struggle ensues. She practically knocks Willy over in her haste to get to her lover. But Willy repeatedly blocks passage until he gets a tip.*]

KITTY

Oh for God's. . . Get outta my way, God damn it! Goddamn valet, go on, git!

Entrez-vous Monsieur.

WILLY

Oh no you don't! Where's my fair share? I pimp for you and you're gonna stiff me? *Monsieur's* sure gonna be gettin' *his* fair share off *Madame* in that there bed. So what about me? What's in it for the poor pimp? I'm supposed to just stand around coolin' my heels? Chewin' cud and watch while you *croquer Monsieur*? No way! I ain't no stupid cow!

Sir ALLCOCK

Open up! Open up!

WILLY

Don't bust my chops! You think I'm lettin' you in before you grease my palm? No way, José!

Sir ALLCOCK

[*Fumbling in his pockets*] Here you are, my good man. Fifty for you.²⁴
And I'll thank you not to call me José.

WILLY

Now we're talkin'! Jeez, that's more like it.

KITTY

Willy? The door. It's gotta be shut. Now go and stand guard.

WILLY

I'll handle this!

[KITTY

Monsieur! Could you *please* get him to put a lid on it.²⁵]

WILLY

And you better not get on her bad side! So: you got some grub on you, or what? It's party time, right?

Sir ALLCOCK

[*Still sheepishly at the door*] Come closer, pussycat, embrace me, dear.
To see you is to be in ecstasy!

WILLY

Hmmmm . . . where *is* the master at? Jeez Louise! He'd be laughin' his ass off.

[*Sir Allcock looks utterly panicked and requires liquor in order to get started.*]

KITTY [*starting to strip*]

Oh, for God's sake, darling, come in. There's nothing to be afraid of.
My husband's out. Come on, man up! All you need to worry about is gettin' this little party started.
I told you: He's out, off in the fields somewhere, and he won't be coming back again today . . . which is why, my darling, if you would be so kind as to . . . strip! Now get your ass in bed and let's get naked! You in or what?

[*Sir Allcock strips more slowly, leaving pieces of clothing here and there.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

My darling, I will follow where you lead.® Your wish is my command, dear, only first . . . Perhaps a pick-me-up?
Okay, let's go. Come on, gimme a squeeze.

KITTY

Embrace me, dear.

WILLY

Ready. Set. Up you go! Mount that pony! Ride like the wind!® And they're off!

Sir ALLCOCK

I feel much better. Now I'm in the mood. C'mere a little closer, sweetie-pie. Let's start off with a little kiss. Like this.®

[*Finally pouncing*] You look good enough to eat! I'm gonna lick you all over, pussycat.

[*Enter the Cat, perhaps tempted by the offer meant for Kitty? or rejecting said offer with a little hiss. This might be a good moment for Willy to grab the partridge leg while the couple is engaging in . . . however much you think they might be doing.*]

WILLY

Go for it! Strap on that feedbag! Sow them wild oats! But hey, boy! No talkin' with your mouth full!

Lordy, Lordy, where *is* the master at? Bet he'd have him a thing or two to say about all that bushwhackin'! Look! I think he's gonna take a bite out of her!

[*Willy prepares the table for the feast.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

O happy man, in all the world so wide!

It's all come true, my every little wish

I've riches, wealth, and, darling, I've got you.

A lover needs his tasty little dish.[©]

I've youth, I've joy. *La santé avant tout.*

[*He might break into song.*²⁶]

WILLY

That may well be, but there's gonna be trouble. Better watch your back!

[*As Kitty starts nibbling on Allcock's ear, he is distracted again by the food.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

Back off a second, won't you, dear? Alas!²⁷ Let's not forget about the fowl I brought.

WILLY

Hey! At least lemme warm it up first!
Foiled again! But, hey, if I'm pimpin' their ride, I'm gettin' me a piece
o' that too, otherwise, no dice.

Sir ALLCOCK

Bless us, o' Lord, for these your precious gifts!
[*Tossing a few coins Willy's way*] Fine, here! You scratch my back and I'll
scratch yours. [*Kitty takes this literally, but Allcock is still more concerned
with food.*]
Come, darling, eat up! Help yourself. Food, drink, just say the word:
all that I have is yours. I promise: you'll get the best of my love.® In the
name of the Father, the Son, and—

KITTY

Yeah, thanks a bunch, I'm sure.

[*She jumps Sir Allcock again. Some of her gourmandise begins to have
the usual gastric result.*]

WILLY

Little tête-à-tête don't seem to be goin' so good. Whoa, Nelly! Down,
girl! She gonna go medieval on his ass! Better get downwind!²⁸

[*He hands Kitty a very full glass of wine.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

I raise my glass to you, dear. Bottoms up!

[*She grabs the glass, balancing it precariously during her ongoing and now
catlike attempts to get more action.*]

KITTY

And I raise my *ass* to you! Oh! That's way too much!

WILLY

Monsieur, Monsieur! Easy does it. She's got a tiny little tummy. Tinier than a little girl's. Why don't I just hang onto that for her? See that now? Not one drop spilled. God damn! Just leave it all to me!²⁹

Sir ALLCOCK

My goodness, you're a good kid, son. You know?

KITTY

Long as there's some liquor in it for him.

WILLY

Hey, *Monsieur!* Not like a "dumb ass" couldn't be wrong about this sorta thing, but, watch out! Better not get her shitfaced!
I, on the other hand, won't do shit without!

[Kitty might struggle to mount Allcock; she might slowly nosh or gluttonously gorge herself; Willy and/or Allcock might try to feed her; either might drink the remainder of her wine, etc.]

[Enter the Husband, who initiates a thunderous knocking at the door. He shows signs of having been rolling around in the fields.]

I'll go get the door. You folks just go about your . . . business.

KITTY *[To Willy, Allcock, or both]*

Go on, hurry up!

[Scene 3]

The HUSBAND *begins*

Yo! Hello! Open up!

WILLY

Who goes there?

The HUSBAND

The Devil take you, boy! Now open this door!

WILLY

The Devil is right. He's gonna break the door down!
What the hell. . . . You're just gonna have to wait.

The HUSBAND

The hell you say, boy, open up! Are you gonna open the damn door,
jackass?

WILLY

Keep your pants on. Haste makes waste.

The HUSBAND

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! Just wait'll I get my hands on you. I'll tan your
hide!

WILLY

[*He picks up his cat.*] You're not afraid o' the big bad wolf, are you?
Gonna huff, gonna puff, gonna. . . . Take a hike, pal!
Gee, do you think he's in a bad mood?

The HUSBAND

Are you gonna open up, you piece o' shit? I swear to God, I'm gonna
kill you.

WILLY

Just tell me your name, buddy, and I'll let you in. You think I'm stupid
or somethin'?

The HUSBAND

What the. . . ? You don't recognize your own master?

WILLY

Yessa massa.
In the fields? Listening to the birdies sing? Seriously? Out makin' hay's
more like it! [*With an obscene gesture*] While the sun shines!
Made short work o' your errand, eh?
Just like them other two!
I'll go get the keys.

[*He saunters back to address Kitty and Allcock, who might find themselves in a particularly compromising position. After all, the master is supposed to be gone for the day.*]

Yoo-hoo! Ma'am? That would be the master.³⁰

Sir ALLCOCK

Good God in Heaven! *Ciel! Votre mari!* Where can I hide? I'm lost, I'm gone! I'll die! Your husband has returned, he's at the door! Advise me: What on earth am I to do? A fine mess I've gotten myself into! Alas, my dear, I fear the end is near!

WILLY

Boy, are you gonna get it now! Four or five whacks and wham, bam, thank you ma'am!

KITTY

Quick, darling! Over there! Go hide in the privy! [*Sir Allcock looks confused.*]

[*The privy! The comfort station! The washroom! The restroom! {Sir Allcock still looks confused.} The latrine! The toilet! The crapper! For Chrissakes, get thee to the shithouse!*]³¹

Don't worry about it, hon, you'll be fine in there. If you should need to cough or somethin', just shove your head in the hole!

The HUSBAND

Hello! Now what? Shit! Are you gonna open this door?

Sir ALLCOCK

That sounds a little kinky, woe is me! What if I were to hide under the bed? I do think I'd be better off, my dear.

KITTY

No way! You can't hide under there! What if he looks under the bed and finds you? He will end us. And it'll be a slow and painful death.

WILLY

Quick! It's the shithouse for you, lover boy! Hop to it, 'cause I'm gonna go get the door and . . . yeah . . . I'm still quakin' in my boots he's gonna whup my ass! Right.

Then again, before he comes in, nothin' wrong with a little swig o' that there wine.

Sir ALLCOCK

Willy! Help!

[A frantic search for articles of clothing ensues, likely with only partial success.]

WILLY

Monsieur: outta sight right now!

Madame: get rid o' that fowl. In fact, I'll take some off your hands right now.

[Willy might consume some partridge thigh, leave most of the leg, and stash the sausage.]

The HUSBAND

Hello! Mary, Mother of God! What the hell is this? Hello! Still screaming here! I'm losin' my voice already.

WILLY

Yo! Comin', boss! Be right there! *[At long last he opens the door.]* Come right on in, sir. Welcome back. All's well, I trust, since your last visit?

[The Husband immediately commences beating Willy as the valet tries unsuccessfully to push his master back out the door.]

The HUSBAND

I'm gonna break every bone in your body!

WILLY

Well I hope you're happy, now that you bashed my head in!

The HUSBAND

Tell me, what's been going on around here. Where's my wife?

[*Enter Kitty, flushed and disheveled.*]

KITTY

[*Very loudly*] There you are, good husband. You seem troubled.³² That deadbeat didn't pay up?

The HUSBAND

No.

KITTY

Surely he must have at least tried to come up with a good reason. A partial payment, perhaps?

The HUSBAND

A good reason? Good heavens, dear, no. As a matter of fact, I haven't found him at home since . . . the last time I found him at home.

KITTY

Mother Mary! I'm so terribly sorry, my good husband. These deadbeats! They can all go straight to hell! Stiffing fine, upstanding citizens, honorable businessmen like yourself.

The HUSBAND

So what's up around here? What's been going on?

KITTY

All's well.

WILLY

All's well, all right. Check out the setup, right over here.

KITTY

[*Under her breath to Willy*] Just wait'll I get my hands on you!

WILLY

Here you go, boss. Your table's ready! They got you all set up.

The HUSBAND

Who's that you say, Willy?

WILLY

Who? Uh . . . nobody, I guess.

KITTY

[*Under her breath again to Willy with increasing animus*] Willy! You better not breathe a word!

WILLY

Who? Me? Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Perhaps *Madame* can tell me what's in it for me if I keep my mouth shut.

KITTY

Willy! Here, take this! [*She hands him another bribe, such as money or another hat.*] Now, not one word.

WILLY

See? I knew you could do it!

Now. . . Whatever could be keepin' lover boy so long on the crapper?

KITTY

[*Aside to Willy*] Shut the hell up! Of all the goddamn gall. . .

[*To her Husband*] What was that you were saying, dear? You got played? However did that very bad man manage to trick you like that?

WILLY

I bet lover boy's sayin' his prayers right about now. You know: the one I'm not supposed to breathe a word about.

KITTY

That fool is really starting to piss me off with these constant interruptions. Isn't it possible, dear, that that very bad man just stepped out for a moment?

The HUSBAND

Could be. He's nothin' but a thief and a rotten crook! I'm exhausted, runnin' around after him like that.

WILLY

Boy howdy! Runnin's better than the runs! Poor lover boy! Good grief! You're in deep shit now, Charlie Brown-Brown-Brownie!

The HUSBAND

Lover boy? What the hell do you mean "lover boy"? Is there a lover in here?

KITTY

Mother Mary, you're not seriously going to listen to *him*, are you?

The HUSBAND

God strike me dead if I don't get to the bottom of this!
Get over here, boy! What on earth possessed you to mention a lover?
And you better not make me wait for the truth if you know what's good for you.

WILLY

I ain't never said nothin' like that, boss. Don't know nothin' 'bout no lover.

The HUSBAND

Jesus H. Christ! What do you take me for? I heard it with my own ears!

KITTY

My dear husband, I'm astonished that you would pay the slightest attention to that dumb ass.

The HUSBAND

I heard him! He said it out loud!
Get over here, fool. What was that you just said?

WILLY

Nothin'! Or may God strike me dead!

The HUSBAND

Nothin'? So what were you talking about just now?

WILLY

Just listen, I was just fixin' to tell you if you lemme explain. I was talkin' about . . . Charlie! Your mare! Old brown mare, she ain't what she used to be!®

[*Aside*] Some other fella done ride that pony better than you.

The HUSBAND

Jesus H. Christ! I'll throw you to the wolves! I should rip your lying throat out and fire your ass!

I never understand what that lunatic's on about. Probably seein' things again . . . from sleepin' on the job!

Enough already. Got anything to eat around here? I could eat. I haven't eaten since I left.

[As the scene proceeds, audible emissions from the bathroom become more and more thunderous, presenting various challenges for camouflaging them. Willy might sing, dance, and above all, whistle.]

WILLY

I know! How's about some partridge? Just fork over some dough and I'll have some for you in a jiff.

The HUSBAND

Here you go: here's five bucks.³³

WILLY

Comin' right up!

Suckers! Christ on a cracker! Am I makin' out like a bandit here or what?

[Willy fetches the partridge from its hiding place and helps himself to some of the juiciest pieces of thigh from each drumstick after pocketing his money.]

Here's for now—it's the very least they can do! Here's to pocket for later.

Well looky, looky here, boss! Whaddaya think o' this here spread? I done bring you a partridge.

The HUSBAND

Where did you get it?

WILLY

It was right at the door.

The HUSBAND

What? Delivered fully cooked with all the trimmings?

WILLY

Yup. All the trimmin's and everything! See here underneath? Got your toast down there, just like foie gras.

The HUSBAND

How much did it cost?

WILLY

Five bucks.

The HUSBAND

Okay, fine, so let's eat already. Chop! Chop!
Hey! What happened here between the legs?

KITTY

[*Glaring at Willy*] Mother Mary! I'm quite sure I don't know!

The HUSBAND

[*Inspecting one of the partridge legs*] You, boy! What gives with the thigh here?

WILLY

I dropped it. It was an accident. And the cat ate it.

The HUSBAND

Right. And the cat had a glass o' wine with it too. I think we all know who the goddamn cat is!

KITTY

Just consider it a tip for the delivery. [*Glaring at Willy*] I'm sure it did him a world of good.

WILLY

I don't know nothin' 'bout eatin' no partridge, I swear! [Didn't grab no thigh and didn't hide no sausage either!] Or, if I did, I don't remember.

The HUSBAND

Eat up, dear. [*Offering the piece of toast*] And here you go, Willy, here's a little nibble for you too. You can fill our glasses now.

[*The Husband falls upon the food, gorging himself. Willy whistles more and more loudly as the coughing sounds from the latrine increase in volume.*]

WILLY

Drink up folks! Drink it on down! [*He pours rather stingily, the better to save—and pour—more for himself.*] Hey! How's about I drink to the both o' you?

[*Aside*] And then I'll drink you right under the table!

Wait! A toast! Lemme get things started. [*Raising the literal toast from the foie gras*] To the happy couple! So, boss? Whaddaya think? Did I leave anything out?

The HUSBAND

By God, I can't say that you did.

KITTY

Willy's a pretty good kid.

WILLY

[*Whistling more and more loudly*] You can always count on me to down a few for a little fun! [Why else would I be onstage?]³⁴ Plus, I know how to whistle, don't I? [Just put those lips together and . . .]

[*Meanwhile, from within the outhouse, Allcock can tolerate the stench no longer. He chokes and coughs in paroxysms.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

Is this the end? Alas! My just deserts? There's no escape!
Alack-ack-ack-ack-ack!

The HUSBAND

What's that? I hear somebody coughing.

WILLY

What it is . . . it must be that ol' brown mare o' yours again. Got a cough.

[*Sir Allcock sneezes.*]

The HUSBAND

Gesundheit!

[*The Husband initiates a frantic search, which turns out to be a bad move: he has eaten way too much way too fast.*³⁵ *Kitty takes this moment to rush to the door and whisper to Allcock.*]

KITTY

Darling, please, we can hear you! You're gonna ruin everything! I'm begging you: if you're gonna cough, shove your head into the hole!

[*During his veritable ode to shit, Allcock will plunge at least his head into the toilet and stay under as long as he can. Needless to say, he reemerges choking, coughing, farting, vomiting, or any combination thereof, even with the seat—or bench—on his head for a time.*]

Sir ALLCOCK

[When you walk through a storm, hold your head down low
And don't be afraid of the dark.® . . .]
Alas! She has not pity for my plight!
A lover such as I reduced to this:
To place my head in such a sordid site,
Alas! My God! where people shit and piss!
To plunge my head into the crappy deep,
Alas! The stench alone's enough to kill
And now, I pray the Lord my soul to keep
My heart is giving out! Alas! I'm ill!
I'm stuck! And my whole face is full of shit!³⁶

WILLY

Poor lover boy! Hold on, pal, hold on! But better get your shit together
and keep your damn voice down! [Hey lover boy! Come on, hang on!]

Sir ALLCOCK

'Tis such a piteous state I'm in! Alas! Am I to die herein?
Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?

WILLY

Well holy shit and glory be! He farted! At any rate, it ain't smellin' too
good. And to think you were just horsin' around with the mistress!

The HUSBAND

Willy!

WILLY

What is it?

The HUSBAND

[*Doubled over*] I don't feel so good. I think I'm gonna be sick. I feel
like my guts are gonna fall out. It's an emergency. I gotta go . . . relieve
myself . . . let it all hang out in the latrine . . . the privy . . . Christ in the
bucket! The shithouse! That's the only thing that'll ease . . . oh,
the pain!

WILLY

Funny you should mention it: I gotta go take a leak myself. Know what? I'll keep you company.

[They race each other to the latrine as Allcock, head above water, hears the commotion and perhaps finds a way to hide in plain sight by blending in with a pile of shit on the filthy floor. Remember Madame de Roncex {above, § "Plot"}?]

The HUSBAND

Owww! My guts!

WILLY

Me too! Owww! My bladder!

The HUSBAND

Don't be a smart-ass!

Sir ALLCOCK

Alas! Alack! They'll shit upon my head!

[Allcock jumps up from his filthy hiding place, covered in merde.]

The HUSBAND

What the hell is this? Oh my God! I'm a dead man!

Sir ALLCOCK

Mwahaha!³⁷

WILLY

Let's get the hell outta here! Careful he doesn't drag you to hell!

KITTY

Mary, Mother of God! I'm a dead woman!

[For the chase and hot pursuit, perhaps some diabolical music such as Schubert's "Erlkönig,"[©] ever popular in horror movies.]

Sir ALLCOCK

[*With his best Devil imitation*] I'm coming to take you away, ha-ha-hee-hee-ho-ho!® King Lucifer himself's gonna bust your ass!

WILLY

[*Making the sign of the cross*] Quick! Get some holy water! It's the shit-demon! Talk about your idle hands and the Devil's playground! [*Attempting to clean his hands and elsewhere*] *Aspergez me domine*. Wash away my troubles, wash away my sins!® You're goin' straight to hell, boss! [*To Allcock*] Pleased to meet you. [*To the Husband*] Hope you guessed his name!®

[*The Husband and Willy beat a hasty retreat as Kitty joins them in flight out the front door. The rest of the drama plays out, mercifully, in the fresh air.*]

The HUSBAND

Sweet Jesus!

Sir ALLCOCK

Scared shitless! They can run, but they can't hide!

[KITTY

I'm all out of breath from running.³⁸]

WILLY

Me too.

The HUSBAND

Mary, Mother of God, have mercy on my soul.

WILLY

What he said! And what's *my* soul? Chopped liver?
Whoa! Where did he go? Musta moseyed on back to the great underworld.

KITTY

He scared me half to death!

The HUSBAND

Sweet Jesus! What the hell just happened here?

WILLY

Aha! I know exactly what happened, boss!

The HUSBAND

So? What is it?

WILLY

[Where?]³⁹

It's on accounta jealous types rot in hell! You got a real fire in your belly, and that devil woulda hauled your ass straight to hell if it hadn'ta been for me! Now pay attention, 'cause I'm gonna tell you why. It's like this: You, sir, are in the wrong. In what I can only think to call a civil tort, you, sir, have been unduly, cruelly, and unusually jealous of your wife and without just cause.

And if it hadn'ta been for my prayer about the asparagus just now, then the green-eyed shit-monster, King o' the Jealous, he was fixin' to drag you right on down with him, all the way to hell! So you better not be jealous no more.

[*From a distance, Allcock is heard coughing.*]

[“It isn't the cough that carries you off! It's the coffin they carry you off in!”] Now get down on your knees and beg your wife for forgiveness!

The HUSBAND

What the hell? Jealous? *Moi*? I've never been the jealous kind!

WILLY

Down you go! Down on your knees!

The HUSBAND

I pray the Lord that He . . . kick my ass if I ever start bellyachin' again!
A pack o' famished wolves can rip my throat out.

WILLY

Now get down on your knees and beg your wife for forgiveness!

The HUSBAND

[*Kneeling*] Okay. Fine. There.

WILLY

[*To both the Husband and the audience*] Shhhhhh! Nobody moves!⁴⁰

You gonna beg her forgiveness or what?

The HUSBAND

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm at her mercy. She holds my life in her hands.

WILLY

[*To Kitty*] Go on: Forgive him!

KITTY

I so forgive.

WILLY

Good show. Very nice. You're sure, now? You forgive him?

The HUSBAND

She's sure.⁴¹

WILLY

All righty, then, boss, up you go! Rise! You'll never be jealous again, or else.

The HUSBAND

Under pain of banishment.

[*Aside*] They'll have to drag me off the stage.

WILLY

[*To the audience*] Talk about your jackass saps! And by the way, don't try this at home, folks!⁴² All goes to show you that, just when you think you're up shit creek. . . .

Sir ALLCOCK

I barely made it out! Skin of my teeth!

Without finesse, I was as good as gone.

You say that might makes right? I say that's wrong!
I'll tell it to you straight, long story short:
If you should be in danger—any sort—
You've simply got to find a clever way:
A ruse, a ploy, a trick to get away
Avoiding death, but keeping your good name.
So, gentlemen,⁴³ we hope you're glad you came.
If not, we're off. But first, a song for you:
Don't blame us as we go. Adieu! Adieu!

The END

3.

Pots and Scams, or, The Farce of the Kettle-Maker Un Chaudronnier

CAST OF CHARACTERS

WILL, the MAN, a Cobbler (L'Homme/Guillemin)

HILL, the WIFE (La Femme/Hannin)

The KETTLE-MAKER (Le Chaudronnier)

[A number of Extras at the marketplace]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce nouvelle tres bonne et fort joyeuse à troys personnages d'un Chauldronnier* appears as #30 in the *Recueil du British Museum* and is relatively well known. Editions were published by Viollet le Duc (*ATF*, 2: 105–14); Tissier, #14 (*RF*, 3: 79–115); and Fournier (*TFR*, 340–43); when referencing the version from *ATF*, I do so by volume and page number alone. Helpful summaries appear in Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #82 (118–19); and Faivre, *Répertoire*, #26 (94–95). The anonymous play was also translated into modern French by Tissier as #14 of *FFMA* (1: 259–69); and by Faivre in *Les Farces* (1: 121–53). Additionally, in this rare instance, we have available a translation into English by Thierry Boucquey (*SMFF*, 147–61). Our *Farce of the Kettle-Maker* comprises 195 mostly octosyllabic verses (again, unnumbered in *ATF*); but, as Petit de Julleville remarks, the rhyme scheme is “seriously mutilated” (*RTC*, 119). Another possible title or subtitle: *Calling the Kettle Black*.

In yet another one of those seemingly endless domestic disputes, Will, the Cobbler (a Guillemin this time rather than a Guillot as in *The Shithouse*), gets into it with his shrewish wife, Hill (Hannin), about this, that, and the other thing. Their conflict is primarily about conflict itself and the quite literal silencing thereof as gesture replaces verbal language. For this particular couple, conflict resolution involves anteing up and making a wager about which of the sexes finds it easier to zip it or, in keeping with the kettle theme, to put a lid on it. Unlike another farcical bet in *The Edict of Noée* (FF, 97–98), in which the loser must shut both an open door and an open trap, it is unclear what the winner in *Pots and Scams* stands to gain other than a sense of gender-based superiority. Once husband and wife have agreed with tremendous boisterousness to silence, their action and, more to the point, their *inaction* is their only mode of communication. In the ultimate metacommentary about the art of pantomime, not only do they hold their tongues: they hold *everything* still. Still as statues.¹

Enter the sleazy specialist and ersatz artisan the Kettle-Maker, who has very much the opposite problem of logorrhea. If Will and Hill are physically dumbstruck by their bet, the Kettle-Maker can't seem to shut up. In addition to his long opening speech, he utters more lines—seventy-two to be exact—than the two other characters put together. His verbosity in the face of their mutism gives way to increasingly audacious acts of aggression. He taunts Will in multiple ways by “finger-painting” the hapless Cobbler's face and by costuming his body, going so far as to dress him up sacrilegiously as the Pope. He then makes an unequivocal pass at Hill, which turns out to be where Will draws the line. Giving in to his simmering fury, Will opens his mouth and speaks, thereby losing the bet—ironically, by doing the right thing (for once?) in defending his wife. As for Hill, her Pyrrhic victory comes with plenty of trouble of its own: she “wins” by allowing herself to be groped. To add insult to injury, even Faivre gropes her metaphorically in his summary: “Who would have thought that a woman's silence could be more trouble than her chattering?” (*Répertoire*, 95).

With its misogynistic take on what Natalie Zemon Davis famously termed “women on top,” *Pots and Scams* brings together many comic strands of many different farces. In a way, it's a prequel to *The Edict of Noée* (FF, #2). Both farces stage a bet between a husband and a wife that amounts to a game

of chicken as to who can keep quiet for longer (*FF*, 95–99). And both feature fabulous vignettes that deploy mime in order to depict the dangers of miming, thus speaking volumes in silence about the very nature of theater. Meanwhile, the couple's donnybrook about filthy, soiled clothing reminds us of *Shit for Brains* (*FF*, 272–73), as does another favorite farcical *personnage*: a third party meddling in a domestic dispute (Payne N. Butts in *Shit for Brains*, the Kettle-Maker here). The Kettle-Maker's face painting further evokes an entire European context of the genre's trickery, wheeling, and dealing, as in the fifteenth-century Dutch play *Blow in the Box* (trans. Prins). There, an idiot seeking the fountain of youth² at market winds up in blackface when another unscrupulous salesman has him blow in a not-so-magic box. In that sense, *Pots and Scams* presents one of the most treasured settings of early comedy: the general malfeasance of the marketplace, a site at which you never know what you're going to get. Appearances are always deceiving, especially in farce. Therefore, when the company proposes to share some wine with the audience at the end of the play, spectators might wish to think twice about any receptacle in which the libation is served. They might likewise think twice about the play's message about the alleged power of women, as encapsulated by a motto also seen in *Birdbrain* (*FF*, 398) as well as in the "birdplay" of our upcoming #4, *For the Birds*: "chicks rule." Maybe, maybe not.

Characters and Character Development

The male role of The Cobbler, farce's cherished dolt, is scripted throughout the original text as L'Homme (The Husband or The Man). His first name is Guillemain, one of the many variants of William, and here he shall be Will. Cobblers in farce are normally morons (*FF*, 88–89; Pinet, "Role of the Cobbler") and, try though he might to sound smarter than he is, Will is no exception. He is certainly not smart enough to avoid being ordered by his wife to effect a large number of household chores (yet another leitmotif taken to hysterical extremes in such a play as *The Washtub*).

The female role of Hannin is scripted as La Femme (The Wife or The Woman). Since she and her husband are two of a kind, I've opted for soundalike names in English à la Jack and Jill: Will and Hill. You'll just need to decide what "Hill" stands for: "Hildy"? Could it be "Hillary"? Depending on how political you choose to get, "Will" could even become "Bill" to yield another celebrity couple. At one point, the Kettle-Maker calls her *ma brunette* (*ATF*, 2: 112); but that does not necessarily mean that she has dark hair. Tissier

thinks that, if she's looking a bit, shall we say, brown-faced, it's as a result of the Kettle-Maker's finger painting (*RF*, 3: 110n). However, the better to draw on the typecasting of Hill, I'm writing her as a blonde or, perhaps, a blonde with highly visible roots. (Feel free to delete "blonde" if inappropriate to the actress cast.) Hill has an extremely foul mouth and is never at a loss for a new epithet with which to berate her spouse in virtually every single line. In so doing, she swears by every saint in the book: think Kathy Griffin imitating her mother. Or, less anachronistically: think the crazed enumeration of saints—make that Sainties—of #7, *Holy Deadlock* (more below, § "Language"). Moreover, some of Hill's interspecies insults will intrigue anyone following the burgeoning field of animal studies, as when she mates mules linguistically with pigs (2: 107).³ Indeed, Hill herself seems to bray like a mule, and she's definitely as stubborn as one (and as stubborn as her sister in arms, Jenny, of #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*). So it's no coincidence that her French name, Hannin, sounds a bit like "little jackass" (*ânnin*), the suffix *in* often being a diminutive for morons of either sex, as for the dopey valet Jenin of many a farce. In English, the puns inspired by her name work slightly better with pigs. You'll see.

Last but not least, when plying his trade, a Kettle-Maker is not as specialized a practitioner as he sounds. This is the Middle Ages. Since medieval crockery did not come with a lifetime warranty, if your cauldron sprang a leak, you didn't exactly pop over to Macy's to buy a new one, particularly if you were short on cash. A professional was needed, a hardware expert, a handyman, whose services were not limited to kettles. Suffice it to say that the unnamed Kettle-Maker of *Pots and Scams* likes to plug holes, wherever he finds them. Any holes. And this one deals tenaciously and repeatedly with the cherished theme of containing leaky vessels (see #8, *Bitches and Pussy-cats*). As indiscriminate in his preference for housewares as clients, he could be played as bi-curious (or curiously bi). Although he eventually expresses a sexual preference for Hill, there are both heterosexual and homosocial dimensions to his fingering. I dare you to conceive a *mise-en-scène* in which the Kettle-Maker is on his knees in front of "Saint Woody" as he intones "Oh come, let us adore thee!"[®]

Language

In *Pots and Scams*, the typical versification scheme of rhyming octosyllabic couplets is frequently in as much disarray as the marriage of Will and Hill. In some spots, a line of verse falls well short of the requisite eight poetic feet; in

others, orphaned rhymes reveal that an entire line (or more) must be missing. In yet other spots, the rapid-fire abuse of Scene 1 gives way to greater poetic complexity—A-A-B; C-C-D; 1-2-3, 1-2-3—almost slowing the play to waltz (see #2, *The Shithouse*, § “Sets and Staging”). Centuries later, it is impossible to pinpoint the causes of these variations. Are they call-outs to long lost popular songs? Can they be ascribed to scribal error or to authorial incompetence (be it theirs or mine)? Regardless of the verdict, a prose translation that makes room for both unfinished sentences and supernumerary song lyrics retains some of the intentional and unintentional idiosyncrasies of the original.

Also of great interest and great fun: the specific saints invoked when Hill and Will are fighting. Saint Cosme is real (2: 1)—the patron saint of surgeons and pharmacists (Côme in modern French, Cosmas in English)—but many of the others would scarcely be found on the liturgical calendar. Saint Coquilbaut, which almost sounds like Saint Cock ’n’ Bull, is in point of fact a spoof name for the patron saint of priapic distress, venereal disease, and mighty phalluses. Jacques Merceron cites chapter and verse on Saint Coquilbaut in his huge dictionary of imaginary saints—and, by the way, who would ever have thought that such a dictionary could *be* so huge? But it is: and it’s teeming with fictitious or otherwise nonhistorical patrons and patronesses of every imaginable condition from laziness to fertility, gossip to impotence, disease to despair, and, in a word, from soup to nuts.⁴ Speaking of which, Saint Coquilbaut comes up, as it were, a few times; so I’ve gone with Saint Woody, which reprises nicely (or not so nicely) one of Hill’s earliest imprecations. Perhaps Will’s woody pops up only in the right company. During the finger-painting scene, this includes at least one moment that is as hard as you can imagine. (To stage.)

Sets and Staging

A natural question arises as to where the action takes place. Tissier suggests the interior of the couple’s home (*RF*, 3: 93n), which would make sense, considering that Will makes his first appearance with a pile of wood that could be for domestic use. But, in my view, the scenography can better reflect the full measure of the Kettle-Maker’s odiousness and the Basochiens’ authorial self-consciousness. If Will and Hill start bickering at home while the Kettle-Maker goes door to door, the snake-oil salesman might actually penetrate their residence, the first of many trespasses. Alternatively, if the couple takes their brawl outside, he could simply happen by. Nevertheless, I’ve opted for



Figure 2. “Chaudronniers, argent des réchaux.” A kettle-maker. Estampes. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Collection Michel Hennin. Estampes relatives à l’Histoire de France. Tome 33, Pièces 2853–2980, 1640.

a different scenario in light of the play’s propensity for metacommentary, which is enhanced in turn by the characters’ own propensity to address the audience. I find it slightly more likely that the action takes place in a street that leads from the couple’s house to the open marketplace. (For a sense of a kettle-maker and his wares, see Figure 2.) Perhaps Will has hung out his cobbler’s shingle to sell his old shoes and, as usual, he is unsuccessful; and perhaps Hill has ventured out to catch her husband in the act of goofing off and to denounce his lack of industry (another commonplace of the genre). Farce was marketplace theater; so a dramaturgical choice that emphasizes commerce proves advantageous in a number of ways:

First, having the unhappy pair “in motion” makes for a better contrast with their eventual motionlessness.

Second, if the action takes place in a very public venue, it is logical that the Kettle-Maker would be more or less in the vicinity with a sales pitch of his own.

Third, a marketplace setting would explain why there is such a large amount of material at hand for the Kettle-Maker's use in costuming the silent couple (straw, spoons, brooms, etc.).

Fourth, it sheds light on the curious verb *suppéditer* of Will's second line (2: 105), a highly unusual, legalistic term related, like cobblers, to the feet. It means "to trample upon someone's liberties" by stomping upon them. Thus, I stage the couple negotiating various obstacles under foot as they wend their way through the littered streets at or near the market, a perfect symbol for the lawyerly life not only of a Basochien but of a cobbler.

Fifth, the overall farcical obsession with metacommentary would thus extend to Christopher Pinet's fascinating if as yet undocumented claim that the ubiquitous cobblers of farce were played by none other than *themselves*: it is "clear that before the advent of semi-professional companies of actors in the mid-sixteenth century, the tradesman-actor played himself in farce" ("Role of the Cobbler," 309).

Sixth and finally, these dramaturgical scenarios highlight the inherent self-consciousness of the couple's silence wager by facilitating a play within a play, a dumbshow within a dumb show. When Will and Hill freeze, statue-like in accordance with their bet, the resulting dumbshow might even attract passersby who toss a coin or two at them. On one hand, if no donation is forthcoming, such metacommentary serves as an excellent reminder that any theater troupe requires compensation. On the other hand, this metacommunication with the audience would signal the potentially dark side of farce. During the escalation of the Kettle-Maker's harassment of the silent couple, any passersby (who might, in fact, be staged) do nothing. Neither, of course, do the spectators of *Pots and Scams*, whose own voyeurism and inertia are *mis en scène* as much as that of the characters in the play.

Dumb though the couple's wager may be, the lengthy dumbshow to which it gives rise is central to the extant scripts but a pale shadow of the action. Indeed, the language with which Hill and Will ante up (2: 5–6) is so subtle and so economical that readers might miss the bet entirely. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I've expanded the stage directions and even some of the dialogue. Elsewhere, although many of the Kettle-Maker's mimed activities can be intuited from the text, we can only guess at the reactions of Hill and Will. What do they do when he "finger paints" them with the detritus from some

of his pots? Or when, in further metacommentary on theatrical costuming, he fashions a straw beard for Will⁵ and grabs up such props as spoons, scrapers, and whatever else is nearby? Or when he rubs suggestively against Hill and, homoerotically, against his Will? Some of the fun and games are reminiscent of the cruel mockery and brutal games to which the body of Christ is subjected in the Passion plays (*FF*, 18–21). But it would also be possible to update the production by having the Kettle-Maker torment the mute couple with the threat of all manner of fingering: he might brandish a box of condoms or don a pair of surgical gloves (à la proctological exam). Otherwise, as in #2, *The Shithouse* or in the mustard-colored stains of *Shit for Brains* (*FF*, 272), the fact that kitchen pots are in such close proximity to chamber pots supplies another whiff of the natural but unappetizing connection to food and excretion. I mean really: when you dine out at a fancy restaurant, do you want the table right next to the toilet? That proximity would hardly have instilled confidence in the Kettle-Maker's clientele. It would, however, have instilled a great deal of audience confidence in the actors' ability to nail this particular comic stereotype.

Costumes and Props

Props for Will include a bundle of wood and, near his "shingle" at market, a variety of old pairs of shoes for sale along with the tools of a cobbler's trade. The Kettle-Maker requires multiple kettles, spoons, kitchen implements, pans, skillets, griddles, and, obviously, pots of every kind—double boilers, Dutch ovens, stockpots, Crock-Pots, chamber pots—all full of various substances of various colors, and some of them overflowing with God knows what. Other materials that assist in the refashioning of Will and Hill are also close by: straw, sticks, refuse, and so on. At the end of the play, the script calls for two jugs of wine; but boxes of wine could be quite funny, as could kegs of beer.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

"A Tisket, a Tasket." Traditional.

"Funiculì, Funiculà." By Luigi Denza and Peppino Turco (in Neapolitan, 1880). English lyrics by Harry L. Alford and Graham T. Overgard [with a better-known English version by Edward Oxenford]. ASCAP Work ID: 60014106.

“I Whistle a Happy Tune.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.
ASCAP Work ID: 390083480.

“Hit Me with Your Best Shot.” By Edward Sydney Schwartz. ASCAP Work
ID: 380218380.

“Breaking Up Is Hard to Do.” By Howard Greenfield and Neil Sedaka.
BMI Work #148908.

“Ain’t That a Kick in the Head?” By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen.
ASCAP Work ID: 310017273.

“K-K-K-Katy.” By Geoffrey O’Hara (1918).

“Amazing Journey.” By Peter Townshend. BMI Work #33852.

“O Come, All Ye Faithful.” [“*Adeste fidelis.*”] Traditional (ca. 1600s or
1700s).

“When the Saints Come Marching In.” Traditional.

“Cinnamon Girl.” By Neil Young. BMI Work #215090.

“Brown Sugar.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #155533.

“What’s New, Pussycat?” By Burt F. Bacharach and Hal David. ASCAP
Work ID: 530135809.

“Walk This Way.” By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.

[Scene 1]

[*In the street*]

[*Lights up on Will and Hill as they prepare to head home from the market, carrying shoes and leatherworking tools, and negotiating various narrow passageways and obstacles. Will is also carrying a large faggot, that is, a large bundle of wood or kindling.*]

WILL, The HUSBAND *begins [whistling]*

A tisket, a tasket, my wood is in the basket.®

HILL

And that deadwood would be you, Woody Wood-peckerwood! [Look at that faggot!] You’re dumb and dumberer.

WILL

[*Exaggeratedly highfalutin*] My dear wife: From what I can tell, you seek to trample upon my liberties.

HILL

And you, Mr. No-Dough, are broke as a [fuckin'] joke. You don't have a pot to piss in, so I don't know what the hell you're singin' about! [*She stops at an obstacle in the road.*]

Would it kill you, Will, for once to say "after you"?

WILL

It's highly preferable—is it not, Hill?—to have fun and frolic rather than to be all melancholic?®

HILL

What would be highly preferable, fool, is if you'd whistle a happy tune® while you actually worked. On fixing those goddamn shoes, for instance.

WILL

Aren't we in quite the mood today!

HILL

In the name of Saint Woody, you got some kinda balls!

WILL

Sow!

HILL

Damn bigmouth!

WILL

It's all—

HILL

Shit!

WILL

In your face!

Listen to the filthy trap on this broad! Very ladylike indeed.

HILL

Oh yeah? And listen to little Tweety Bird over there, regaling us with his merry melodies!

WILL

Well, my, my, my! She does get all bent outta shape at the sound of my dulcet tones!

HILL

Dulcet tones, my ass! Speakin' o' which, bonehead: You can bet your ass I'm bent outta shape when I hear you brayin' like a mule. Hee-haw! When our sow's in heat, singin' in her pen, she sounds just like you. Oink! Oink! Oink!

WILL

Touché, Miss Piggy! Just keep it up, Hill.

HILL

[*Making both a fist and an obscene gesture*] *Touché* yourself, Willy boy, [*aside to the audience*] just to keep it up!

WILL

So go on, quit foolin' around!⁶ Hit me with your best shot. Fire away!®

HILL

In the name of the Blessed Virgin, no thanks.

WILL

Just wait'll I get my hands on. . . . No sparlin' the rod for you! [*He picks up a stick and threatens her.*] I'll teach you to keep your voice down.

HILL

All bark and no bite, you big pussy! I'm *so* scared o' you, you filthy piece o' shit! Yo! Lost and Found just called: you can get your balls back.

WILL

I'm a piece o' shit? What about you, Miss Thing? Not a great bouquet down there yourself. I hear they call you Skunk Cabbage.

HILL

And they call you Sir Pansy. Goin' down, down, down-doo-by-doo-down-down.® Game over!

WILL

[Sniffing] You're smelling a little gamy down-doo-by-doo-down-down® there yourself!

HILL

[Taking a tour of his stained trousers, front and back] And what's this supposed to be, Colonel Mustard? [I'll give you a fuckin' clue!]

WILL

Hillbilly!

HILL

Fairy!

WILL

Redneck!

HILL, *hitting him.*

Fathead!

WILL

You hit me, you old bitch? Ain't that a kick in the head! Put 'em up!

HILL

Drop your weapon!

WILL

*And, you, drop the subject! She thinks she's gonna trample on *my* liberties! Surrender, Dorothy!*

HILL

You surrender, Dorothy! I'd rather die!

[*A battle ensues.*]

WILL

What the hell do you think this, a Passion play? Jesus H. Christ! She's kickin' my ass!⁷

HILL

Victory is mine, sayeth the woman! Chicks rule!

WILL

That's blasphemy! There's no schmuck on the face o' this earth gonna play along with that crap.

[*She grabs the stick and beats his feet so he dances.*]

HILL

Up yours! Victory is mine!

WILL

Not entirely.

HILL

Oh yeah? Who you got, gonna take me on in the bitchin' department? Come on, who you got?

[*She begins to fumble in her bosom to locate coins to ante up.*]

There's not a bitch in this town can bitch bitchier than me. Or sue your sorry ass in court.

WILL

I don't take fools' bets. Women win the bitchin' contest hands down. You know, you'll sooner see Lucifer himself flappin' his wings in heaven again before you find a woman gonna shut her yap for five minutes and give it a damn rest.

HILL

You're on! Put up or shut up.

WILL

For real? Not a peep? You won't move a muscle?

HILL

Won't bat an eye! And God knows about movin' *your* muscle! [Never a slip between cock and lip.]

WILL

[*He pulls out his coins.*] [Care to make it interesting?] I'm in for two bits.⁸ Easy money. I'll watch the kitty.

HILL

The hell you say! I rule, and I always will!

WILL

You don't say. So go on. Name your terms.

HILL

You're gonna go sit down right over there and take a goddamn vow of silence. You'll be as quiet as the grave and about as noisy as a goddamn crucifix. Not one word to a single living soul, not even to confess your sins.

As for me, no stranger I to zippin' it: I'll be as quiet as a church mouse and as still as a Chinese statue.⁹ [*She poses, Buddha-like.*] [Unlike some, I know how to control myself! I'm master of my domain!]

WILL

Will you listen to Miss Know-it-all! Okay, Brainiac, you're on! [*He holds out a boot, into which they both drop their coins.*] I'm a shoo-in to win.

HILL

No breathin' a word, no battin' an eye.

[Scene 2]

[Enter the Kettle-Maker, who should walk the stage seeking customers, eventually catching a glimpse of the motionless couple out of the corner of his eye.]

The KETTLE-MAKER

K-K-K-Kettle-maker right here![©] Step right up, folks! Pa K-K-K-Kettle right here!

Hmmmm. . . . Better give it the old college try: K-K-K-Kettle-maker! Who's got pots need fixin'? Step right up, gents! Lemme work my magic! She'll never blame *my* tools! Gonna plug two holes for the price o' one!

[He sizes up the place again and then speaks loudly, perhaps because the audience did not applaud his entrance.] Or maybe I should just run along. Wait! What do we have here? Why, I do believe it's some poor working stiff.

[Puzzled that Will is not moving, he knocks on his head.]

Yo! Hello! Anybody home?

Wait! There's two of 'em!

Well howdy-do, there, Missy. How's it goin' in the kitchen? Standin' the heat? Got any holes for me to plug? You hear me? Hey, lady! Speak up! I see you lookin' right at me! What is she, deaf or something? Or dumb? More like dumb as a bag o' hammers! *[He rubs against her.]*

[Deaf, dumb, and blind chick lives in a quiet vibration land.®] Yo! Hey, lady! *[He waits for a response.]* Dumb blonde! Bimbo! God, maybe she is deaf!

Moving right along here. . . . How's about you, there, *Monsieur*? No pots for me to fix?¹⁰ Yo, Boss! You deaf and dumb too? Or just a dumb ass? Good God almighty! Not a word outta him either, and he's starin' right at me! Lookin' daggers. Oh yeah? *[He sidles up to Hill and begins to grope her.]* Eyes wide open, mouth wide shut? Well, I swear by these here tools, I got ways o' makin' him talk. Yo! John-Boy! Got a bee in your bonnet? Oh, I get it. Too uppity to talk to me, is it? Dude don't bat an eye! Don't make a peep. It's like lookin' at a goddamn icon! *[He picks up a stick.]* Yo-ho-ho and quickety-quick! Cleanin' them chimneys, it's Old Saint Dick! No, wait! I know: You can be the Pope! *[He picks up some straw.]* You'll have your long, flowing beard. Or maybe . . .

here you go! How's about ye olde crown o' thorns? [*He places a filthy pot on Will's head.*] But whatever are we gonna do for your cross? I know! You can have this lovely spoon. And, in the other hand . . . let's see . . . instead of a book, you can hang onto—here you go!—this pisspot. Heavenly Father, aren't you a sight for sore eyes! Quite the distinguished gentleman. Better watch your saintly ass and not burst out laughing! You'll spoil the damn miracle! Now . . . Maybe just a little touch-up for the full effect. All eyes on you. I can take care o' that little paint-job with these two fingers . . . right about. . . . Just wait'll I get my paws on that beatific little mug o' yours. A little finger painting, that's right. I got a *real* soft touch. Real gentle. Jesus H. Christ! All hail Saint Woody! Ain't you a beaut! Make a fella wanna get down on his knees and. . . . Oh come, oh *Côme*, let us adore thee!® Ooh-la-la, when the saints come marchin' in! I wanna be in *that* number!® What's that now, folks? Cat got your tongue? And yours? What the hell. . . ? Dude still hasn't moved a muscle. Yo! Hey, lady! Yo, *Madame*! God only knows, you sure look like butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. Wanna be my cinnamon girl?® How's about we have us a private little chat? Come on, honey, gimme some sugar. [*He "paints" her too while licking his lips.*] Mmmmmmm. Brown sugar! You know it tastes so good.® Stuck-up broad!¹¹ But, God almighty! I got ways o' makin' *you* talk too! One way or another, I'll get somethin' outta one o' you. [*He overacts his "study" of Hill, sniffing, licking her face, and the like.*] Well, glory be! She's the spittin' image o' Venus, Goddess o' Love. Look at that cute little snout. And Jeez, what a rack! When Nature made her . . . Forgive me for being so forward but—lemme tell you, sugar—your skin is so soft. And just look at how sweet and patient. . . . Will you look at that! She's lettin' me nose around all over her. [*Dipping lower.*] What's new, pussycat?® Sweet Jesus! Ready or not, here I come! Gonna start off with a little kiss, like this.® [*He then attempts to lead her offstage.*] Walk this way, babe.®

[*Will takes the pot off his head and smacks the Kettle-Maker with it.*]¹²

WILL

The hell you say, motherfucker!

The KETTLE-MAKER

Ow! My head! You tryin' to kill me?

WILL

I ain't no saint, and I'm just gettin' started! Got plenty more where that came from!

HILL

I win, you lose! Thank *you*, Mother Mary! I'm still the mistress of the house! [And master of my domain!]

WILL

Get your ass over here, you lousy slut! C'mere. What are you lettin' that sleazeball grope you for like that?

HILL

What do you think? To win the bet!

[*With a marked change in linguistic register*] Surely, I oughtn't to have permitted impulsivity to interfere with my victory in our little wager. That's tellin' him! Do I talk good or what?

WILL

When you're right, you're right. Let's go get a drink.

HILL

Let's go! However, by the power vested in me, I direct that the Kettle-Maker shall come along.

WILL

By my soul, he most certainly shall not.

HILL

[*Grabbing money from the boot*] By *this* holey sole, he most certainly shall, jealous though you might be.

WILL

Well, if that's how it's gotta be, come on. But you better put the kissin' on simmer.

The KETTLE-MAKER

Yeah, yeah: you showed me, all right—beat the crap outta me.
But, hey! All o' you out there in the audience: Wanna join us? Come
on along. Let's go drink to the wager! Say it with me now, folks, so it
gets into your heads: Women on top. *All* women. Yours too.

HILL

We've come a long way, baby!

WILL

Let's eat, drink, and be merry! Come on up, folks, wherever you're sit-
ting, so we can drink it on down.

*[Doubled version in verse begins here.]*¹³

The KETTLE-MAKER

I got beat up! I'm black and blue.
Hey folks! Yo! I'm talkin' to you.
Come join us. Gonna toast our bet.
So listen up and listen well:
Those wives o' yours: dudes, time will tell.
They win. Chicks rule!

HILL

I say you bet!

WILL

Let's hit the bars. I need a drink
The end's much closer than you think.
We got two jugs we're gonna share.
The more the merrier. I don't care.
So party on! It's time to go!
We hope that you enjoyed the show!

The END

4.

For the Birds, or, Conjugal Birdplay

La Mauvaistié des femmes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CONNOR, the Husband (Rifflart)

MAGGIE, the Wife (Finette)

[Possible Extras at a bustling Christmas market]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce nouvelle à deux personnages, c'est assavoir: Rifflart et Finette, la mauvaistié des femmes*, appears in two of the great French collections: the *Recueil Cohen* and the *Recueil du British Museum*. The first version is #48 in Cohen's edition of the *Recueil Cohen* (385–89) and in Koopmans's new edition of the rebaptized *Recueil de Florence* (673–80). Unfortunately, for anyone wishing to consult the Middle French, the Cohen edition is far easier to access; for that reason, I follow his *RC*, albeit drawing lessons from—and tipping my hat to—Koopmans's erudition (*RFlorence*). However, when precision is of the essence, both editions are required and both are cited in my critical apparatus. The second version of our play appears as #3 in the *Recueil du British Museum* under the name of *Farce nouvelle tres bonne et fort joyeuse de l'Obsination des Femmes* (and from which I also draw an occasional lesson). According to Barbara Bowen, the version from the *Recueil Cohen* was printed as *La Mauvaistié des femmes* “probably in Paris around 1540,” and the version from the *Recueil du British Museum* was ushered into print by Jehan Cantarel in Lyon between 1532 and 1550 (*Four Farces*, xi). More recently, Koopmans has contested the assertion about the *RC* version, submitting instead that its date of publication was 1517 (*RFlorence*, 680), whereas Tissier maintains that the *RBM* version was published in Lyon in the first part of the sixteenth

century (*FFMA*, 2: 189). Multiple modern editions of that latter version (*RBM*) attest to great interest in a play that many have found exemplary, including Viollet le Duc, *ATF*, 1: 21–31; Fournier, *TFR*, 125–29; Tissier, #31 in *RF*, 6: 17–60; and Bowen, *Four Farces*, 1–13. *La Mauvaistié des femmes* was also translated into modern French by Tissier, #31 in *FFMA*, 2: 187–96; and by Faivre, in *Les Farces*, 1: 33–65. For helpful summaries, see Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #158 (188–89); and Faivre, *Répertoire*, #120 (311–12). The play is 199 octosyllabic verses. To my knowledge, there is no English translation.

There are some interesting variations in these editions, including missing lines and the like, which are addressed in the notes as they occur. For now, let's just say that, for any medievalist or editor, aspects of the dissemination of this play are utterly fascinating. The text of the *RC* is more complete and probably older than that preserved by the *RBM*; or, as Koopmans surmises, it might have been copied from an older version of the tale that influenced both texts (*RFlorence*, 680). How do we know that? Brace yourselves for an excursus into how things worked prior to the Xerox machine and Internet cut and paste. (If I bury the medievalist shoptalk in a note, I fear you'll never read it.)

In ye olden days, people practiced the lost art of *copying things down long-hand*. In the case of the *RBM*, we know that a tiny part of the play was lost to what we call “haplographies” in the manuscript; there are a couple of them. A “haplography” indicates a moment when a scribe or copyist looks away from the original while he is transcribing it in the new copy; but when he returns to the original, *he returns to the wrong place*. Instead, he finds the same word or phrase that he has just copied in a *different* line of the original manuscript. If he has gone to the wrong place earlier in the text, this creates repetition (and since farce *loves* repetitiveness [*FF*, 48–49], it can be very hard to spot). But, if he jumps to the same phrase further along in the original text, this creates a hole or a “jump” in the new text: whence the French expression, *un saut du même au même* (“a jump from the same to the same”). Although the phenomenon is difficult to explain, it is simple to visualize. Let's say that, in the original, the word “cuckoo” appears at the end of line 5 and again at the end of line 15. After copying line 5, the scribe would find his place again at the word “cuckoo,” but would mistakenly find the wrong “cuckoo” at line 15. His accident then creates a situation in which ten lines are lost to history: at least they would be if all that survived were the newly copied version.

In the transmission of medieval manuscripts, haplographies were common, and sometimes they created holes in meaning as well. Those holes, moreover, are what can prompt medievalists to dub texts “corrupt” or “mu-

tilated.” In *For the Birds*, something similar happens; but, since we are lucky enough to have two versions of the same play, the *RC* version teaches us what is missing from that of the *RBM*. Here is how we put the pieces of the puzzle back together again:

At verse 147 of the Cohen edition (fol. 295v), we find the phrase *jamais ce propos ne lerray*, which I’ve translated as “I’m never getting off that perch” (literally, “I shall never back off from that statement”). In the *Recueil Cohen*—and only in the *Recueil Cohen*—there follow seven lines of dialogue until, at verse 154, the same phrase, *jamais ce propos ne lerray*, appears anew. In all probability, at some point in the transmission of this text, a copyist lost his place after copying verse 147 and, when he returned to his source, he “jumped” to verse 154, creating the haplography. But wait, there’s more: thanks to his unprecedented access to the original text of the *Recueil de Florence* (*FF*, 39–40), Koopmans was able to identify yet another haplography and to restore some text that is missing from all the extant editions (at vv. 117–21; below, note 16).

Plot

Everything about the married life of Riffart and Finette (here, Connor and Maggie) is literally “for the birds” in a play that enters into an intertextual dialogue with other ornithologically inspired farces in which “chicks rule” (as in *Birdbrain*, *FF*, 398–99). Indeed, our categories of plot, character, language, and staging come together in *For the Birds*. But, first, a confession:

To the extent that any of the medieval farces are known today, *For the Birds* plays third fiddle only to the *Pathelin* and to the *Washtub* (both projected for retranslation in a later anthology of mine). I just didn’t get it. When I first read this very popular play, I dismissed it out of hand as a crashing bore and an unworthy candidate for translation. I found it a silly exercise, a set piece about another fouled marital nest. I mean, really: Who could care less about whether the Wife’s cuckoo or the Husband’s magpie should occupy the birdcage under construction? For me, the plot laid an egg. But what do you know? Its bird’s-eye view of marriage slowly grew on me. The symbolism kept on pecking, much as I’m doing here with all these tenacious bird idioms and idiocies. That’s right. There was something both linguistically and theatrically striking about all those birds. For one thing, wordplay with the ornithological counterparts of man and wife was thick throughout: the yacking magpie (*pie*) for the tricky wife, the crazy cuckoo (*cocu*) for the husband. But, in Middle French, *cocu* looks and sounds just like *coqu*, the term for *cuckold*,

which is often spelled exactly the same way (*cocu*) (below, § “Language”). For another thing, the performance possibilities of all that homonymy bordered on an onomatopoeia that was probably hysterical when spoken aloud (below, § “Sets and Staging”). Eventually, *For the Birds* won me over. Besides, it made sense to like it. Medieval people clearly did. So, think of the play as a dated classic, a medieval forerunner to such a beloved American marital farce as *The Honeymooners*.¹

The entire play revolves around a conflict as to the proper occupant of the marital cage: Which bird shall lodge therein? And, by extension, which *spouse*: the male or the female of the species? Connor thinks that it should be the annoying magpie of a wife, with her incessant yak-yak-yakking; Maggie thinks that the cage best befits a cuckolded cuckoo bird of a husband. Begging your pardon for my mixed—make that interspecies—metaphor: Which sitting duck should it be? The literally henpecked Connor, the cuckold; or the literally henpecking Maggie, the magpie? Which mode of conflict works better in an argument? Brute physical force or endless persistence that wears your opponent down and out? And who triumphs in the end? Connor or Maggie?

It turns out that nobody puts “Baby” in a corner or Maggie in a cage. Despite the frequency with which farce stages both metaphorical and physical cages—consider another cuckold who locks his wife inside the house in *Cooch E. Whippet* (*FF*, 347–49)—Maggie wins. Her cuckoo it shall be. But Connor gets to pick it out, a full participant in his own emasculation. Winning?

For the Birds is cuckoo for cuckoldry. One sings, the other doesn’t. One plays and one gets played in a play that stages the very nature of conflict as its central conflict. For his own part, Faivre cleverly sums up the comic genius at play as a “conflict that is completely balanced in its imbalance,” even though his closing joke rings as sexist as it did above for Hill in #3, *Pots and Scams* (§ “Plot”): “As we all know, ever since Adam and Eve, the only way to get a woman to shut up is to tell her ‘yes’” (*Répertoire*, 312). And yet, depending on production values, it is the play’s very misogyny that renders it both verisimilar and potentially tragic, a dark comedy about voice, voicelessness, and domestic imprisonment. Also, when Connor threatens to abuse Maggie physically in order to impose silence—we just saw a version of this as well in *Pots and Scams*—it reminded this reader—*moi*—of a very particular medieval implement of torture. It was called a brank or gossip’s bridle, an ominous metal device that silenced a woman by literally pinning her tongue.² Meanwhile, even Connor cuts a tragic figure by the end of the play. Much like the

inmate who is coerced into digging his own grave, he has fashioned the cage of his own marital prison.

Last, *For the Birds* comes to a close with what has long struck critics as a curious, two-pronged reference that seems to suffer from irreconcilable differences. On one hand, the couple alludes to determining the sex of a cuckoo bird and, on the other hand, to celebrating Christmas with Christmas shopping. Starting with the former matter of the bird's sex, the answer is this: "sneak a peek under the wing" (*RC*, v. 186). At first glance, this seems to mean—and surely *does* mean—that a *cuckold's* equipment is so small that it's practically invisible. But in the context of the joyous celebration of the birth of Christ, the curious pairing is not inconsistent with some of the darker origins of the Christmas spirit (nor with the couple's several sacrilegious exclamations of "Jesus Christ!"). So I allow me to *speculate* by proposing another theory for which the proof is in the Christmas pudding. By all means, remember *The Second Shepherd's Play*, but remember, too, the notorious King Herod and the bloodbath dramatized in *The Massacre of the Innocents*. Faced with the terrifying prospect of the murder of her firstborn, one of the mothers in the English Chester Cycle begs a brutal soldier to look under the child's wing to determine whether it's a male or a female: "Nay, freke, thou shalt fail; / my child shalt thou not assail. / *It has two holes under the tail; / kiss, and thou may assay.*"³ Big things may or may not come in small, farcical packages; but, regardless, *For the Birds* makes for one strange, tragicomic Christmas present.

Characters and Character Development

In light of the comparison above to *The Honeymooners*, I thought of calling Riffart and Finette "Ralph" and "Alice," in honor of the characters so brilliantly brought to life by Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows. But there are other dramatis personae in other farces called "Riffart" and "Finette." The trick in English was to select names that not only work across the repertoire but also properly evoke all the birdplay with magpies and cuckoos. It was also to unite in holy deadlock the play's multiple objects of ridicule: marriage, imprisonment, and adultery.

On the medieval stage, "Finette" and "Riffart" are both rife with meaning. The latter, sometimes spelled "Riflart," is associated with stealing, fleecing, guzzling, gorging, angering, killing, fighting, hitting, and even the scratching, sniffing, and scabbing of leprosy. The common thread of all those connotations is excess, exaggeration, criminality, sneakiness, and vio-

lence, the bread and butter of farce. In the case of *The Husband*, it's all about the cuckoo, the kook, and the cuckold. Therefore, since "Cookie" would have been too sweet, and since "Cooch" insufficiently captures the character's thieving ways, I've opted for "Connor," evocative of "con man"—an evaluation Maggie even voices. (He does indicate that he will *purchase* a bird at the end of the farce; but isn't it more likely that, like Pathelin, he prefers to cook some mark's goose? Or, given Maggie's complaint about his promiscuity, some other *woman's* goose?) Plus, by play's end, Maggie is calling him "Connie," its diminutive feminine ending highlighting her emasculation of her husband and driving home the point that he might well con others but not *her*. Last but not least, there is another con man by the name of "Rifflart" in another superb farce, *La Confession Riffart*, who resorts to the sacrament of confession itself in order to milk a priest for all he's worth.⁴ By the way, I briefly entertained naming Riffart after another bird of a feather who would have preserved the traditional cuckold's horns: the great or helmeted hornbill, no great beauty, I assure you. Unfortunately, the hornbill is not well known to the general reader, whom I could scarcely oblige to purchase the *Field Guide to the Birds*. "Connor" it is.

As for "Finette," a name that derives from trickiness, wiliness, and an ability to *finish* a guy off, several changes were necessary to maximize the punning. (There is another Finette in *Birdbrain*, for instance, whom I christened Trixie [*FF*, #12]; but, as I said, I hadn't been planning on translating *For the Birds*.) The present Finette is one of many farcical wives who is constantly upbraided for excessive chatter. Thus, her appropriate ornithological avatar is "Maggie," philologically close to the magpie of the play and consistent with the name's resonance in English. Yak-yak-yak.

Language

Given the popularity of this short play, I thought that, for once, I might render it in free octosyllabic verse, the better to convey the breathless pace of the original. At the same time, I've presented it in paragraph form to avoid the appearance of doggerel. If you read the play aloud or, better still, perform it, you will hear its singsong quality.

As noted above, wordplay is key to the entire plot, which cannot be understood independently of the linguistic association and punning, facilitated by Picard dialect (*RT*, 2: 56), between "cuckoo" (*cocu/coucou*) and "cuckold" (*cocu*). If that observation sounds like just another piece of obscure medieval-

ist geekery, perish the thought. The etymological kinship of “cuckoo” and “cuckold” is well enough known today to have made Wikipedia: “*Cuckold* derives from the cuckoo bird, alluding to the alleged habit of the female bird of changing its mate frequently and authentic practice of laying its eggs in other nests within its community.”⁵ In *For the Birds*, the orthographic choice for “cuckoo” is *cocu*, rather than *coucou*. This is most intriguing for both onomatopoeia and meaning.

Like the sounds of the cuckoo clock, the couple’s barbed exchanges have a repetitive, nursery-rhyme, “repeat-after-me” quality that creates an almost pedagogical ambience of “that’ll teach you.” But this is not Master Mimin relearning French in the chicken-coop classroom of the equally ornithologically inspired *Birdbrain* (*FF*, 392–96). Nor is it precisely our play’s hypothetical pet magpie being trained to call Connor a pimp or, as Connor insinuates, to call *for Maggie’s* pimp. It is, rather, the untrainable, uncageable Maggie, who needs no instruction whatsoever in how to taunt her man with refrains of *cocu! cocu!*⁶ More than anything, the sound of the cuckoo call is that of the *cuckold* call, as if Maggie were hurling the same insult at Connor again and again: *cuckold! cuckold!* While medievalists tend to discount the seemingly limitless variations of Middle French spelling, the choice of *cocu* for cuckoo resonates more than the *coqu* of the *RBM*. Plus, the absence of the *coucou* spelling from both manuscripts is a feature that actually detracts from some of Connor’s physical violence: *cou-cou* would have been a textual and auditory homonym for *coups! coups!*, the “blows” of a battering (or of my occasionally anachronistic gun metaphors: but they work with Modern French, where a gunshot is still a *coup*). Instead, *cocu* draws attention to Connor’s status as the (stupid) victim of Maggie’s unrestrained sexuality. Finally, call me cuckoo but all that *cocu, cocu, cocu* sounds a bit like how a stutterer would pronounce the word for “asshole” (*c-c-c-co-cu[l]!*) Not far-fetched in the slightest in that, when Connor proclaims that a maggie-pie is his pick for the cage, his wife’s response is basically “shove it up your ass!”

Sets and Staging

The action clearly takes place in the home of Connor and Maggie; but a backdrop might help to contextualize all the talk of bird shopping. If the concept seems foreign to contemporary American audiences, they need only recall that the Parisian *marché aux oiseaux* or bird market is still going strong on the Ile de la Cité. Every Sunday, it boasts birds of every feather.

Beyond that, there is a crucial choice to be made in performance as to how much physical violence to stage, when, and for how long. That choice will affect the comic or tragic pacing of all the rapid-fire dialogue, which might be slowed or interrupted by fight choreography. There could also be amusing opportunities to have all that drama give way to a bustling, appropriately equipped bird market when the couple heads to market at the play's end, where . . . to reconcile or not to reconcile? That is the question.

Costumes and Props

The main prop is Connor's cage-in-progress; he needs a proper workspace along with various tools with which to fashion it. Decide what you will about the bird market and any ornithological stage presence, ranging from stuffed animals to Big Bird to live birds. Maybe consider that helmeted hornbill after all.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

"Dance of the Cuckoos." By Marvin T. Hatley. ASCAP Work ID:
340004686.

"Rockin' Robin." By Michael McGinnis and Jimmy Thomas [Leon René].
ASCAP Work ID: 482484079.

[*A Play in One Act*]

[*Possible opening pantomime set to music*⁷]

[*In the home of Connor and Maggie*]

CONNOR

It's marriage, folks, it's for the birds!
All things considered, ain't you heard?
Day in, day out, it's hell on earth.
It's marriage, folks, it's for the birds!

"No, you!" "No, me! I get th'last word!"
A federal case. It's so absurd
It's marriage, folks, it's for the birds!
All things considered, ain't you heard?

But now I best get back to work.
'Cause, if my wife should happen by,
For sure, she's gonna tan my hide.⁸
All day, all night, it's hue and cry.

I better work and that's no lie.⁹
So, just to get her off my case
And put that magpie in her place
I better finish up this cage.¹⁰

MAGGIE

What's Connor up to?

CONNOR

Whatcha think? I'm finishing this cage, my dear.

MAGGIE

That's it? Well God damn you to hell! God damn your lousy, lazy ass!
And what exactly is your plan to make a living? All you do's a big goose
egg 'round here. It's true, you goddamn birdbrain!
Let us pray: may God himself see fit to launch upon your sorry ass . . .
a plague. A punishment that's oh-so-cruel—unusual too—all just for
you.

CONNOR

You're cursin' me out? What'd I do? Good God, Mags, when I married
you, you promised me, from this day forth, to love, to honor, and *obey*!
But all you do is curse me out. That's some fine mess. The hell with it!
I'll make this cage. I don't care if you throw a fit.

MAGGIE

What the hell for?

CONNOR

It's for a bird. A lovely *magpie*, don'tcha know.

MAGGIE

What *will* she say?

CONNOR

How 'bout: "Get lost! You sleazy pimp"?¹¹

MAGGIE

No, *you're* the sleaze! I can't believe you're such a schmuck!

CONNOR

At least I'm not a sleazy pimp.

MAGGIE

We'll just see who comes when she calls. If she should speak your name, you'll know.

CONNOR

I'm one good egg, I'll have you know. I'll best any man in this town. If I deem fit, I so declare: I'll place a magpie in this cage. No other bird. That is my will.

MAGGIE

And I say: blow it out your ear, you cuckoo bird! Now sing cuckoo!

[*Aside*] *Cuckold's* more like it.

Jesus Christ! I don't care if you throw a fit. A cuckoo, Con-Man, 'sgoin' in. You hear?

[*The couple starts battling over the cage.*]

CONNOR

A cuckoo? Ante up! I got two bits says: no way, bitch! We got a peckin' order here, I tell you, I'm no sitting duck.¹² I'd sooner fly the coop right now. A magpie's goin' in there, Mags.

MAGGIE

And I say I shall have my way, like it or not.

CONNOR

[*Aside*] Ain't that the truth!

Quit caw-caw-cawing like a crow. A magpie's goin' in!

MAGGIE

No way! Cuckoo! You're crazy as a loon. Yo! Connie, hey! it's cuckoo time!

CONNOR

I swear by all that's holy, bitch, you're lyin' through your goddamn teeth. My word is law. Jesus H. Christ! Caw-caw till you're blue in the face. But I say I shall have my way. Now quit it, or I'll bust your beak. Pow! To the moon! I swear to God!

MAGGIE

Oh yeah? Not goin' very far. I'm gonna kick you in the nuts. You hear me, chump? Then, you'll be blue.

CONNOR

My dear, I think that's quite enough. Shut up!

MAGGIE

Says who?

CONNOR

Says me. Shut up!

MAGGIE

For stupid, drunken scum like you?

CONNOR

Enough!

MAGGIE

Fuck you! Fuck you!

CONNOR

You too! Shut up!

MAGGIE

Says who?

CONNOR

Says me! Shut up!

MAGGIE

I'd shut up for a lousy drunk?

CONNOR [*with a menacing gesture*]

Right in the kisser, Maggie, pow!

MAGGIE

Who's gonna do it? You?

CONNOR

Who else?

MAGGIE

Knock yourself out and bring it on!

CONNOR

Watch out before I pop you one!

MAGGIE

You really think I'm scared o' you? Christ! Cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo!

CONNOR

Watch out before I pop you one!

MAGGIE

Who's gonna do it? You?

CONNOR

Who else? Good God! No need to screech like that! What are you now? A spotted owl?

[*He returns to his cage.*] Just one last turn here of the screw . . . my cage is done. Oh yeah: screw you!

MAGGIE

What goes inside?

CONNOR

A maggie-pie.

MAGGIE

A cuckoo, I say!

CONNOR

Nuts to you!¹³ Leave me alone!

MAGGIE

Talk about nuts. What goes inside?

CONNOR

A maggie-pie. All sweet and pretty, fits right in. She's not too fat and not too thin. [By any measure, all just right.]¹⁴

MAGGIE

What goes inside?

CONNOR

A maggie-pie.

MAGGIE

A cuckoo, I say!

CONNOR

Nuts to you! Not so she's trained to call your pimp! Whatever will the neighbors say? She sings that tune, my goose is cooked. Bird in my hand, hand not in bush. Not *yours*. No matter what it costs.

MAGGIE

A cuckoo, my fine, feathered friend, is goin' in. That's one fine bird.

CONNOR

No way, Mags, that's not happening. Not one more word. You hold your fire! As soon as I'm all finished up, I'm off to buy a maggie-pie.

MAGGIE

What for?

CONNOR

To stick it in right here.

MAGGIE

A pretty cuckoo! Jesus Christ!

CONNOR

Wait till I get my hands on you. You'll soon say "magpie."

MAGGIE

Is that so? Good God! You think I'll change my tune? A cuckoo-bird,
I say!¹⁵

CONNOR, *striking [her]*

[Magpie!] Now, say it with me, Mags. You hear?

[*He grabs her by the throat.*] You're gonna get it now. "Magpie." Say it.
Come on. Say it. Speak up.¹⁶

[*Of course, Maggie cannot speak until he releases his chokehold.*]

MAGGIE

A cuckoo!

CONNOR

Yeah? You want some more?

You're gonna get your *quatre cents coups*¹⁷

Until you do a Maggie-pie.

MAGGIE

A cuckoo!

CONNOR

Yeah? You want some more?

MAGGIE

You're gonna have to kill me first.

CONNOR

Say "magpie" now. I'll ask you nice.

MAGGIE

Mother of God, no way, I say. A cuckoo!

CONNOR

Yeah? You want some more? You'll meet your maker. That's no joke.
What do you think this is? A farce? I'll finish you! I'll load my Mag.¹⁸

MAGGIE

You wanna kill me, lousy brute? You pig! That's what you wanna do?
I'll see the Mayor! I'll tell all! A lawsuit 'bout your cheatin' ways! You
can't rip folks off your whole life. Fuck you and bugger off, you crook!
I'll whack you in your ugly mug if you lay one more hand on me.

CONNOR

If I hear one more word from you 'bout cuckoos or some other bird,
I'll break that ugly beak o' yours. I'm gonna beat you black and blue,
so shut up! Not another word between us. [*Possibly to the audience too*]
Let's have silence please.¹⁹

MAGGIE

I should shut up? Sure, dream on, pal, 'cause I know why the caged bird
sings.

CONNOR

I know. I take thee at thy word. But, come on, now, Mags: pretty
please? Just say that it's a maggie-cage 'cause that would please me. Get
it now?

MAGGIE

It's for a cuckoo! One more time: I'm never gettin' off that perch!²⁰

CONNOR

A magpie!

MAGGIE

That, I'll never say. It's for a cuckoo. Jesus Christ!

CONNOR

[*He fumbles in his purse for coins.*]

How 'bout I make it worth your while? Now say it!

MAGGIE

Good God! I will not. It's for a cuckoo. Holy Christ! I'm never gettin' off that perch!²¹

CONNOR

What choice is there but giving in unless I wanna foul my nest? Good God! I'd have to kill her first before she'd ever change her mind.

MAGGIE

You got that right. No maggie-pie. [And I'm not playin' chicken here.] I'll have my say-so in this house. Since you saw fit to beat me up, a cuckoo-bird is goin' in. And I won't hear another peep. I'm warning you: you speak again and, outta spite, I'll burn it down: the cage and everything inside. You understand me?

CONNOR

Yes, my dear. I'm sorry . . . [*under his breath*] you're my bitchy wife.²² You really want the folks out there to think that I can't rule my roost? It's not for wives to flip the bird at husbands. It ain't natural. What would they say? It just ain't right.

MAGGIE

We women see things differently. I'm no exception to that rule. A chick will never shut her yap—her *beak*—that's just the way it is. A cuckoo's goin' in that cage. [You bet: that's how it oughta be.]²³ A pretty bird, you mark my words. You gonna buy me one? Or do I have to buy him for myself?

CONNOR

I'll pick the kook . . . the cock . . . the cuckoo out for you, since that's my role.

MAGGIE

And how do *you* propose to tell if it's a female or a male?

CONNOR

You sneak a peek under the wing. That, Mags, is how you know what's what.

[*The couple turns to face the audience.*]

MAGGIE

Go get a Christmas cuckoo, folks, it sings a merry tune all year. A little birdie told me so.

CONNOR

Let's run along together, dear, to find what goes inside your cage and shove it . . . in.

[*In a variation of the traditional envoi, the Company asks the audience to look after things. As they leave, they pass the hat for financial contributions.*]

But wait! who's gonna watch the house while we're at market? These folks here? You really think they look okay?

Take care of us folks! Whatcha say?

It's time to pass the hat, you know?

We're comin' through, headin' your way.

We hope that you enjoyed the show!

The END

Here ends the Farce of the *Obstination des Femmes*, first published
at the Press of the late Barnabé Chaussard,
near Notre Dame de Confort.

5.

The Jackass Conjecture, or, Animal Husbandry

Le Pont aux ânes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHNNO, the HUSBAND (Johannes)
JENNY, the WIFE (Dame Niche)
PADRE AMADEUS (Messire Domine Dé)
The WOODSMAN (Le Boscheron)
MOLLY, the MULE (L'Ânesse Nolly)
[The Couple's Valet]
[Some College Students in the audience]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce nouvelle fort joyeuse du pont aux Asgnes*, #25 in the *Recueil du British Museum*, appears in Viollet le Duc, *ATF*, 2: 35–49; Fournier, *TFR*, 148–54; and Tissier, #32, *RF*, 6: 61–111. Petit de Julleville provides a helpful plot summary in *RTC*, #172 (217–18); as does Faivre in *Répertoire*, #135 (346–47). L. Robert-Busquet translated the play into modern French (*Farces du Moyen Age*, 109–16), as did Tissier as #33 of *FFMA*, 2: 197–209. I know of no English translation. Tissier posits a date of composition after 1475 by a Basochien (*RF*, 6: 66–69); he also states that the play was published in Paris by Nicholas Chrestien between 1547 and 1557 (*FFMA*, 2: 199).

The anonymous *Le Pont aux ânes*, in rhymed octosyllabic couplets, is 286 verses; again, Viollet le Duc does not provide verse numbers. Alternative titles or possible subtitles include *The Jackass Principle*; *Bridge of Sighs*; and *Stumbling Blockheads*.

Bear with me because the *Pont aux ânes*, literally the Bridge of Asses, is almost impossible to translate. What can I say? That didn't stop me. The play is well worth reading. As the cast of characters playfully enacts medieval house rules, the play itself offers fascinating if troubling access to misogynistic thinking and practice. Philologically speaking, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Suffice it to recall at this time that, as is so often the case in farce, the entire play revolves around a play on words that is so organic to plot, character development, language, sets, and staging that it complicates and pretty much invalidates the usual categories of these "Production Notes."

We enter the scene in medias res, where the inept husband, Johnno (full name Johannes), is unable to maintain order in his home. Despite trying everything from begging to pleading to threatening, he does not know how to discipline his wife. That's right: ever since God admonished Eve in the *Jeu d'Adam* not to deviate from her husband's *discipline* (the Latinate term for both discipline and the whip), that particular directive has posed problems for farcical husbands;¹ and *Le Pont aux ânes* is no exception to the rule. Poor Johnno!—that's what audiences are invited to feel—nothing works for him. His Jenny is stubborn as a mule or, more consistent with the animal husbandry at play, stubborn as a "jenny" (female donkey). To add insult to injury, she even goes so far as to suggest that, if he wants his midday dinner, he'll have to prepare it himself!

Upon losing yet another battle, Johnno encounters a curious Italian clerical figure who urges that he hightail it over to the Bridge of Asses. Only there will he penetrate the enigma of how to take his wife in hand. Johnno listens and obeys—obviously, he hasn't quite gotten the hang of the obedience thing yet—and he heads for the titular bridge. As the Padre predicted, all is revealed when Johnno witnesses firsthand how to get an ornery critter to behave. When a Woodsman faces resistance from Molly the Mule, who balks at crossing the bridge, he beats her into submission until she does. Thanks to this enactment *à la lettre* of the play's central metaphor of the Bridge of Asses, Johnno finally gets it. And, boy, is Jenny gonna get it. He is pleased to put that lesson into action with a new regime of corporal punishment on the home front.

Of special interest: *Le Pont aux ânes* is modeled on a tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which King Solomon himself resolves a similar domestic dispute (wisely, of course, albeit without what would pass today for wisdom).

He sends an ineffective husband to the “Goosebridge,” where another obstinate and, later, beaten-down mule refuses to cross over to the other side.² However, almost in a mockery of the tale’s Italian provenance, Solomon has been replaced in the French version by the philosophically inclined Father Domine Dé in the role of marital consultant. In *The Jackass Conjecture*, our understanding of that character is aided and abetted not only by such compatriots as Doc Phil of #1, *The Newlywed Game* but by another tradition of medieval advice giving. Making several appearances throughout and cited explicitly (*ATF*, 2: 37) is one of the most popular anthologies of folk wisdom of its day, *The Distaff Gospels* (*Les Évangiles des quenouilles* or *Livre de Quenouilles*), the first dated edition of which was published in Bruges in 1475. Now highly accessible in an English translation by Jeay and Garay, it is a marvelous compilation of old wives’ tales, aphorisms, and counsel shared by female interlocutors as they do their spinning while spinning yarns. The title, *Les Évangiles des quenouilles*, notes Fournier (*TFR*, 150n), derives from the exclamatory response that follows each pearl of wisdom uttered in the text: *Vray comme Euvangile*, which I translate as “Ain’t that the gospel truth!”³ In *The Jackass Conjecture*, Johnno is the one quoting the wisdom of chick lit. And he ought to know.

Characters and Character Development

Johnno is another poor schmuck, slow on the uptake and in desperate need of guidance about how to manage house and home. Almost any regional accent might befit him—play him as a hick, a cracker, a greaser—but the key to the *personnage* is blue collar. Given the farm creatures and rural settings, I’ve opted for Southernisms; but other dialects are easily substituted in performance (“dude” for “boy,” etc.). Johnno is a working stiff who simply isn’t stiff enough; plus he’s too dopey even to notice when sex is being proposed. By the way, the precise nature of his work, and lack thereof, is unclear. That said, there is a strong implication that the lawyerly actor *playing* Johnno is far more industrious and intelligent than the character. From time to time, a sudden change in linguistic register from dumb as dirt to eloquent spotlights the difference between the two.

As for Johnno’s wife, allow me first to say that, to enter the world of *The Jackass Conjecture* is to learn more about donkeys, mollies, hinnies, and interspecies breeding than anyone ever needs to know. I’ve dubbed her “Jenny” the better to emphasize the play’s running comparison of women to she-

mules. Since a “jenny” is both a female ass and an etymological derivative of “John,” that name works well for the character whose identity derives from being Johnno’s wife. In the text, she is Dame Niche, *niche* usually signifying “silly,” “naïve,” “foolish,” “moronic,” or, just as likely when preceded by “Dame,” the *wife* of someone silly, naïve, foolish, or moronic. I thought of calling her “Molly,” as in “Molly Maid” or, better, “Molly mule” (which denotes a female mule capable of carrying a fetus); but I reserved “Molly” for the other female character, the *piece* of ass *de résistance* herself, the actual mule on the play’s bridge.⁴ So Jenny it is. She is not nearly as aggressive as some of her female counterparts in farce; instead, she exudes negative energy. As Faivre points out, she is not a dominatrix per se in that she does not seek to impose her will but, rather, refuses *his* (*Répertoire*, 346). Jenny also tends to repeat herself and to fly off the handle; so she could be portrayed as an alcoholic. This would add extra humor to her slew of accusations about Johnno’s drunkenness.

Regarding the couple’s modes of addressing one another: Johnno and Jenny are actually capable of speaking fairly good French. But they do mix multiple styles and registers, from foul-mouthed insults to aphorisms to academic in-jokes. As their opening argument heats up, the polite *vous*, an ennobling sign of respect even within married couples, quickly shifts to *tu* as their grammar gets sloppier and sloppier. Additionally, when trying to sound highfalutin, they tend to mess up with the imperfect subjunctive. (They’re only human, right?) Since they are more than likely country folk in a rural setting (below, § “Sets and Staging”), I’ve largely taken their grammar down a notch.

In the midst of her donnybrook with Johnno, Jenny alludes briefly to their valet (2: 39). His existence could be purely hypothetical, with Jenny dripping with sarcasm about the servants whom the couple is too impoverished to employ. Or he might be real—and really useless—like such kindred spirits as Willy from #2, *The Shithouse*. The odds favor the first choice in that Jenny speaks of *several* valets (2: 39), even though I’ve retained only one in Scene 1 for the poetry of my rendition of some of the rapid-fire dialogue. You decide. Whatever the verdict, the real or imaginary houseboy could be enlivened by mime.

Monsieur Domine Dé of Calabria is part philosopher, part cleric, and part self-help guru. It is he who unveils the mystery of the play’s life lesson as well as its location at the Bridge of Asses. And he does so by spouting a bizarre admixture of psychology and theology that is as muddled linguistically as his philosophy is conceptually. If Johnno and Jenny mix registers,

that's nothing compared to the Padre's macaronic hodgepodge of logorrhea. ("Macaronic" language applies to a jumble of Latin and vernacular words; it was also common in sermons on both sides of the Channel.)⁵ For Domine Dé, one must hear a Franco-Italian dialect that is closer to French and Latin than to Italian (*TFR*, 151n). It's a "pidgin French" that I prefer to term Fritalian (by analogy to the Flatin I proposed for *Birdbrain* [*FF*, 374]); and it is a type of linguistic gibberish that the French call a *charabia* or, here, a *baragouin italien* (*RTC*, 218). However, even the most gibberish-like nonsense is not necessarily non-sense. Everything the Padre says is decipherable. So decipher it we shall. Typically, this involves my lengthening many of his speeches (and indicating where I have done so). Beyond that, everything else related to Johnno's Virgilian guide through the hell of marriage presented substantial challenges, beginning with his very name.

I briefly entertained Tricky Dominicky. But, inasmuch as *Domine Deus* (*Dé-us*) is part of a frequent liturgical refrain in praise of God, he shall be Amadeus (*Ama-Deus* for "love of God"). Although he is addressed as "Messire" in the text—an honorific title reserved for the *crème de la crème* of clergymen, doctors, and lawyers—I've opted for something Italianate if a bit less noble than "Monsignor": Padre. The actor cast as Padre Amadeus will need to speak in the thickest of Italian accents, especially when intoning the play's most important line about hastening to the Bridge of Asses (below, § "Language"). In the interest of full disclosure, I avow that there is, in fact, an ideal translation, the perfect *mot juste*. The problem is that the perfect *mot juste* is just too politically imperfect to use. *Le mot juste, c'est le mot injuste*. Capture though it would the insulting ethnic humor of the play, times have changed too much for the better to allow it stand. Monsieur Domine Dé of Calabria ought really to go by "Amadago" or "Domine Dago"; and I impart this information in order to encourage exploration of the dramaturgical possibilities for rendering what we now condemn as "hate speech." Even today, the punch lines of French ethnic jokes tend to land their slurs by targeting the mispronunciation of French by non-French individuals hailing from everywhere. No national origin and no ethnicity is excluded: American, German, Congolese, British, Belgian, Swiss, and, in this case, Italian.

Onomastics aside, there has been some debate in the secondary literature about whether the character of Monsieur Domine Dé is modeled on a real person. Both Petit de Julleville and Fournier speculate that he is a send-up of the famous religious figure Saint Francis of Paola (1416–1507), who was also from Calabria (2: 44) and who is not to be confused with Saint Francis of Assisi.

(For legibility of my translation, it was neighborly⁶ to substitute Venice for Calabria. If I say “Venice,” you think Bridge of Sighs, along with lots and lots of water under lots and lots of bridges . . . and everywhere else, for that matter.) At a time roughly contemporaneous with the *Pont aux ânes*, Francis of Paola was summoned to the court of Louis XI, presumably to do what Padre Amadeus does in this farce: counsel and advise.⁷ The cleric reluctantly obliged, settling in the king’s favorite home at Plessis-lez-Tours in the Loire Valley. That valley is where our play is set, its titular bridge spanning the Loire (2: 44).

Finally, intriguingly, and most delightfully: it is clear that a nonhuman animal must be represented onstage. The Mule is a bona fide character in the play and, given that a “molly” is a real zoological term for a fertile mule, let’s go with Molly, the Mule. You could call her Nelly if you like, which is technically closer to the original Nolly, except that in English, Nelly is more usually perceived as a horse’s name. Faivre suggests that the mule might be played by two men in the canonical horse suit. His rationale? Notwithstanding Bert States’s stimulating work on real animals on stage in his classic “The Dog on the Stage,” an actual donkey would be too “unpredictable” (*Répertoire*, 347). For myself, I am reminded of the hilarious joke in the restaurant scene of the film *Victor/Victoria* (1982). Toddy: “Oh, they didn’t shoot a real horse . . . just a costume with two waiters in it.” The waiter’s snappy comeback: “[I]t is a moron who gives advice to a horse’s arse.” Learning *from* a horse’s ass is the whole point of *The Jackass Conjecture*.

Language

Brace yourself, dear Reader. This explanation is long but, by the time you get through it, it will all be water under the bridge.

First and foremost: when Padre Amadeus names the solution to Johnno’s marital troubles—ordering him to the Bridge of Asses, there to contemplate what husbandry should be—he repeatedly declares, *Vade, tenés le pont aux asnes* (“Go, behold the bridge of asses”) (2: 43–44). But the play’s watershed *pont aux ânes* is *untranslatable*, at least as a single maxim. The closest one might muster to parallel the economy of the original is “Get your ass in gear!” But that turns out to be wholly insufficient. Unpacking the catchphrase in English requires time and space, so I take it, expanding the dialogue when necessary. Serendipitously, it turned out that, in keeping with the Padre’s macaronic speech, an infamous Italian phrase entered popular culture in 2012 at the time of the *Costa Concordia* disaster. If you don’t think that

event is the least bit funny, all I can say is: neither is the domestic violence in *The Jackass Conjecture*. Plus, the Italians had a sense of humor about it when marketing T-shirts emblazoned with their Coast Guard's command that the derelict Captain return immediately to the bridge of the sinking ship: *Torna a bordo, cazzo!*—roughly, “Get back on board, shithead!”

That was one solution. Another involved conveying the farceurs' ingenious vision of the simultaneously literal and symbolic (the zenith of which can be seen in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*). The play's Bridge of Asses is not only a physical site—a bridge across the Loire—it is a beloved idiom that allegedly originated in this very play (*TFR*, 148n). So what on earth is it?

Let's be medieval about it and use Ockham's razor: i.e., let's diagnose the problem by thinking horses, not zebras. Make that *asses*. In common parlance, ordering someone to the *pont aux ânes* was the Middle French equivalent of saying “get lost” or “take a hike.”⁸ But, in context, it also evoked the scholastic world of mathematics, logic, and philosophy, all the more so in that university learning was one of the favorite butts of Basochial jokes. In formal logic, the *pont aux ânes* denoted the middle premise of a syllogism, the unit of reasoning that *bridged* premise and conclusion. And, if formal logic doesn't strike you as a laugh riot, I invite you to view the Monty Python exchange between Mrs. Premise and Mrs. Conclusion. (Mrs. Conclusion buried her cat *before* it died because the conclusion was inevitable.⁹) From there, we easily fathom how a visit to the Bridge of Asses came to connote people so stupid that they see a brainteaser there where there is none. They are stumbling blockheads who trip over obstacles that are not actually obstacles at all. Certainly, that is the case for a husband who doesn't know how to put one foot in front of the other. Whence another common meaning of the *pont aux ânes*: “there's the rub” or “here's the hitch.” In *The Jackass Conjecture*, the *hitch* is marriage itself.

The *pont aux ânes* derives from the Latin *pons asinorum*, which, like marriage, was a puzzle, a riddle, a conundrum, or a stumper, but only for dummies. And the point of the idiom is the very point that is logically and theatrically demonstrated for the intellectual edification of the dummy of our play. As Oudin attests in his compilation of proverbs and idioms, the medieval *pont aux asnes* refers to the poorly founded reasoning of a fool or an ignoramus (*Curiositez*, 438). In the *Littré*, it designates a piece of wisdom that is so simple and so banal that everybody knows it . . . or *should* know it. Simply put, whatever the apparently unbridgeable impasse of life—be it marriage, law school, seminary—a man would have to be a real jackass to consider a *bridge*

to be an obstacle when the bridge was built precisely to *resolve* the obstacle (the river). Likewise, in *The Jackass Conjecture*, it is the untraversable river (of marriage) that is the obstacle, not the bridge constructed to traverse it. The bridge is not the problem: the bridge is the solution. But, in the present day, the solution is also a problem. In order to bridge the gulf between male indoctrination and female disobedience, *Le Pont aux ânes* advocates securing submission through ass-kicking or ass-whipping any wife who is as stubborn as a Jenny. But the real jackass is Johnno; and a contemporary performance can reverse and reappropriate the black humor to underscore that very thing.

That charming philology in place, we now understand the evolution of the *pont aux ânes*. What started out as mockery of incompetent students doing their Euclidian geometry in a half-*assed* way eventually applied to nitwits in general. Persons stuck at the Bridge of Asses were people too stupid to submit to the truth of the evidence right before their very eyes, people who “can’t see the forest for the trees.” As for the dumb-ass Johnno, once he witnesses the events at the literal Bridge of Asses—which stubborn Molly the Mule is too dumb (but not too mute) to cross—Johnno grasps the mystery of animal husbandry. Ain’t that a kick in the ass?

In sum, the translator’s challenge—a real one as opposed to a *pont aux ânes*—was to convey all the “asinine” undercurrents of the play. The challenge that proved insurmountable was locating a single expression that would marry idiocy, bridges, mathematics, and humor. (I found trigonometry a drag, not a farce.) One possibility, which I rejected as too clunky, would have been the creation of an Expositor—a frequent character in mystery plays—who could step forward to gloss the “Bridge of Asses” for the audience. One could even have the Padre break character to explain the line. But I’ve already had brief recourse to that technique when it helps make translational sense of specific phraseology or the play’s self-conscious macaronics (a few telltale pieces of proverbial wisdom; the meaning of *The Distaff Gospels*). I hope to have found a better middle ground and built a better bridge to the *pont aux ânes*. In Scene 1—and, the better to foreshadow the big reveal of the donkey crossing—I opted for any and all verbiage related to donkeys, bridges, and mathematical lingo.¹⁰ The original text also plays with such foreshadowing, as when Johnno describes Jenny as unwilling to take a single step (2: 43). That phrasing is virtually identical to that of the Woodsman in Scene 3 (e.g., 2: 45). The key is artistic self-consciousness and metacommentary. There is no fool like a married fool. All such fools are the landlocked companions of Sebastian Brant’s “scientific fools” of *The Ship of Fools* (*Das Narrenschiff*)



Figure 3. “Wanting to Know All Regions.” The Scientific Fool from chap. 26 of Sebastian Brant (1458–1521), *Narrenschiff* (*The Ship of Fools*). Woodcut attributed to the German Gnad-Her-Meister, 1498. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. University of Houston Digital Library. <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll15/item/77> (accessed 9 January 2016).

as they navigate their course to farce’s distant marital lands. Indeed, Brant’s work—which was translated into French twice in short order by Pierre Rivière (1497) and Jean Drouyn (1498)—is roughly contemporaneous with farce, its imagery particularly à propos. The original caption of our Figure 3, as translated into English by Alexander Barclay, nicely sums up farcical performance: “Who measures heaven, earth, and sea, / Thus seeking lore or gaiety, / Let him beware a fool to be.”¹¹

Patience, dear Reader, we are almost done but, believe it or not, all the issues above barely scratch the philological surface of the play. Adding to the

intricacies of the proverbs and axioms of *The Jackass Conjecture* is another tag line that captures the life lesson to be enacted upon Molly and, later, Jenny. At the denouement, Johnno comprehends another aphorism, this one also virtually untranslatable into English. *Besoin fait la vieille trotter*, which first appears at 2: 40, means literally, “necessity makes the old [girl] trot”; or, more loosely, makes her “go giddyup,” “gallop,” or “step on it.” Once again, a large parenthetical space is needed here for a deluge of ramifications, many of which speak to the misogyny of the medieval farcical household and many of which endure in contemporary French-language ass proverbs. Consider, for instance, *femmes et ânes ruinent des maisons* (“women and asses ruin a home”); or *rien ne peut empêcher les pies de jacasser, les ânes de braire, les sots de chanter, les femmes de parler* (“nothing stops magpies from yakking, or asses from braying, fools from singing, women from talking”). But the real kicker has got to be this one, which encapsulates the moral of our asinine story: *il n’y a pas d’ânesse qui ne trouve son âne*, or “to every jenny, her jackass.”¹² In my translation, I amplify Johnno’s soliloquizing as he muses about what to do, such that the quest for the right English-language proverb becomes part of *his* quest. The strategy works well for a character who is not the sharpest tool in the box.

Other linguistic features of the *Pont aux ânes* include lexical attraction to the vocabulary of law, forensic rhetoric, and epic poetry (as in Ganelon’s treason from the *Song of Roland* [2: 48] or Jenny’s self-proclaimed exploits [the *vif esplaict* at 2: 36]). At times, rhymed octosyllabic couplets give way to other poetic meters, creating a distinctly singsong (braying?) quality; at other times, 1-2-3 rhythms seem to beat out a now familiar waltz as Jenny and Molly give their masters a literal song and dance that might readily be staged as one. Additionally, *The Jackass Conjecture* contains a *hapax*, short for “hapax legomenon” (*RF*, 6: 90n), meaning a word that, to our knowledge, occurs once and only once in all surviving medieval sources. In *The Jackass Conjecture*, that word is *tablative* (2: 40) and, obviously, the definition of any given hapax legomenon can be inferred only from context. *Tablative* likely has a legalistic meaning on the order of “downtrodden.” And, speaking of legalese, in light of the overall atmosphere of academic in-jokes, I’ve made room for a certain number of pointed barbs launched *at the audience* by pretty much every character except Molly the Mule (but please feel free to try). *The Jackass Conjecture* practically begs for college-age spectators, students who might be endeavoring to master their coursework but who are still experiencing, shall we say, *obstacles* owing to the lacunae in their training.

Last but not least: there is much ado throughout about beans (*feves*, now *fèves*). It turns out that beans, as well as the peas with which Johnno confuses them, are heavy fare for any marital diet. Even the most cursory glance at the specialized Middle French dictionaries quickly reveals enormous legume-inspired complexity and humor. For example, in Di Stefano's *Dictionnaire des Locutions*, the entry for *feve* spans two pages (345–46) and contains such ingredients as *aporter la feve*, signifying “to give voice to,” “to lend one’s voice,” or even “to vote”; *bouter aux feves*, “to make someone love-crazed”; *entrer es feves nouvelles*, “to fall in love”; *gagner la feve*, “to gain an advantage”; *prendre la feve au gasteau de quelqu’un*, “to stick your nose in somebody else’s business”; and, even more specific to our play’s combo of beans and peas, *promettre febves et pois*, “to promise the moon”—or, maybe, à la Ralph and Alice, to send your wife there. We find, moreover, in Bidler’s *Dictionnaire érotique* (284) other connotations that are more germane still: *la fleur des feves*, which associates beans with menstruation.¹³ Since *feve* also refers to the vagina, it is of a piece with medieval proverbial wisdom about the food-related ways in which “gals” roll out the red carpet, as in *les feves sont en fleurs*, *les fous en vigueur*, which one might translate loosely as “when the female fields are flowering, only a crazy man wants to sow his seeds.” (Or, as Kaitlyn said to Farmer Chris on the nineteenth season of *The Bachelor* [2015], “you can plow the fuck out of my field any day!”) In other words, a bean is never just a bean. It can drench some of the play’s more curious references to leakage, staining, and soiling with piled-higher-and-deeper meaning. Furthermore, *dire or ramentevoir febve* can yield “this one’s for you,” as in “to bean somebody good” (the literal punch line) but also “to be joking,” as farce is wont to do. Elsewhere, in the mouth of the Padre, there’s even something beanlike about the term *favelle* (2: 43), which means “word;” but it also sounds like a fava bean (without the nice Chianti).¹⁴ And, if all that still doesn’t seem to amount to a hill of beans, then remember that, in France, a special cake is part of the holiday of Epiphany, which celebrates the Nativity visit of the Three Wise Men. The cake is called the *galette des rois*; and a special bean is baked inside, representing the baby Jesus. The person who finds not four-and-twenty blackbirds but the lucky bean becomes the King or Queen for the day. So here’s my epiphany: the caged Christmas cuckoo of #4, *For the Birds* was weird; but, now, a Christlike bean farcically stuffed into a cake helps to enact popular wisdom about how to keep your wife in tow. WWJD? Is that really what Jesus would do? Surely He would not mount a downtrodden wife, tan her hide, and run roughshod all over her? You do the math. By any just orthodoxy, that is a bridge too far.

Sets and Staging

The action calls for two main sets, connected by a country road: the home of Johnno and Jenny; and a rural setting featuring the Loire River, a bridge, and the forest from which Molly and the Woodsman will emerge. Since many Anglophones will associate France's famous châteaux with the text's explicit site in the Loire Valley, one could depict, say, Chenonceau on a backdrop. If it seems absurd to stage an American hick in the environs of French royalty, farce has never shied away from such absurdity but, rather, thrives on it. Thus, I've retained the Loire in the script but, if you don't agree, a funny-sounding U.S. river would also do the trick: try the Tallahatchie, or the fictive "Redneck River." But get ready to account for the alternative absurdity of how the Padre wound up so far from Italy.

When Johnno mentions having seen some beans earlier in the day of the play's action (2: 35), we have a clue as to the time of the events. His reference to "dining" normally indicates the midday meal; so chances are that, as we would say today, he has returned home for lunch. There will be no afternoon delight for him.

Mime will be crucial to each scene, corporealizing a wealth of asinine behavior, and not just by the ass. Wacky staging ideas might even literalize the bridge as that of the Starship Enterprise. For the final scene in which Johnno brutally mounts and disciplines Jenny in acts that are shockingly and disturbingly consistent with sexual assault, I recommend staging the hyperreality of its violence as a ballet (much as I suggested for *Playing Doctor* [FF, 198]).

Costumes and Props

The home of Johnno and Jenny boasts a most inelegant "dining" table, likely a plank above two-by-fours, and there are multiple bottles of wine, goblets, corkscrews, and cooking receptacles, a spinning wheel for Jenny—what goes up must come down®—along with various tools of whatever trade Johnno practices (or fails to) as he wields his handy copy of *The Distaff Gospels*. By the river, there should be huge piles of logs and kindling, as well as plenty of rope to lead an ass—in full donkey-suit costume—to water. At the titular bridge, a large "Donkey Crossing" sign might further heighten the comedy.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

- “Spinning Wheel.” By Thomas David Clayton. BMI Work #1396227.
“Ain’t That a Kick in the Head?” By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen.
ASCAP Work ID: 310017273.
“Forever and Ever, Amen.” By Paul L. Overstreet and Donald Alan Schlitz.
ASCAP Work ID: 360231698.
“Beast of Burden.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. ASCAP Work
ID: #320231165.
“Little Green Apples.” By Bobby Russell. ASCAP Work ID: # 420143580.
“The Bible Tells Me So.” By Dale Evans. ASCAP Work ID: # 320044331.
“Shake a Tail Feather.” By Otha Hayes, Verlie Rice, and Zephire Williams.
BMI Work #1318017.
“Alouette.” Traditional.
“I Shall Be Released.” By Bob Dylan. SESAC Work Number: 515006.
“The Old Gray Mare.” Traditional.
“Dang Me.” By Roger Miller. BMI Work #275944.
“Bridge over Troubled Water.” By Paul Simon. BMI Work #150264.
“Git Along, Little Dogies!” Traditional.
“Good Golly, Miss Molly.” By Robert Alexander Blackwell and John S.
Marascalco. BMI Work #494171.
“I’m a Woman.” By Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. BMI Work #4175708.
“Mustang Sally.” By Bonny Rice. BMI Work #1026286.
“Witchy Woman.” By Don Henley and Bernie Leadon. ASCAP Work
ID: 530175669.

[Scene 1]

[In the kitchen of Johnno and Jenny, Jenny pours herself an enormous glass of wine.]

The Husband begins.

JOHNNO

Hey! Where the hell are you, Miss Jenny! If you woulda been a nicer wife, then it surely woulda been high time for dinin’.¹⁵

JENNY

How the hell am I even supposed to put together a proper stew in this “household”? There’s barely a bread crust around here. You don’t have two cents to rub together.

JOHNNO

Beggin’ your pardon, but do too! [*He hunts around for some food.*] I coulda sworn I saw some peas around here somewhere before headin’ out. First thing this morning, I’ll have you know.

JENNY

Those are beans, moron.

JOHNNO

Boy, howdy, woman! Such a fuss! You don’t gotta be so literal.

JENNY

Enough. I know what you meant. They’re all ready to go in the kitchen.

JOHNNO

Then why in the name o’ Sam Hill ain’t we dinin’?

JENNY

Go boil some water.

JOHNNO

Good God almighty, that’s women’s work!

JENNY

Good God almighty, that’s servants’ work!

JOHNNO

That’s right! So gimme some service. Go on, serve!

JENNY

If I feel like it.

JOHNNO

Serve, I tell you! Now, do it!

JENNY

I help and you help yourself? I serve and you get serviced? Ain't that a kick in the head!®

JOHNNO

You got that right. It's only natural. One of us has gotta carry the load, and it's gonna be you. Forever and ever, amen.® Now hop to it before you get the back o' my hand!

JENNY

Like hell!¹⁶ I'll never be your beast of burden.®

JOHNNO

[Whoa, Nelly!] It's for wives to set a proper table and put out a nice spread, with a nice tablecloth and everything and the good china, like decent folk do. And, when the husbands bring company home, they best show some goddamn manners.¹⁷

JENNY

Which is exactly what they fuckin' do!

JOHNNO

It's for wives to be loyal and true and to keep the lord and master happy.¹⁸ Ain't that the gospel truth! But just let menfolk make one single move to show 'em what's what, and they wanna raise the Devil!¹⁹

JENNY

Which is exactly what they fuckin' do! Ipso facto, you goddamn wacko!

JOHNNO

Sure as God made little green apples® and froggies croak and birdies sing: I know, I know, the Bible tells me so.®

[And, I'll have you know, so does that other holy book: *The Distaff Gospels*. {Jenny looks nonplussed as Johnno brandishes his favorite book.}]

{*To the Audience*} Come on, there folks, don't tell me you ain't heard of it. It tells the gals how to handle their menfolk. . . .

{*Breaking character*} Come on, people: it's an advice manual. A medi-
eval self-help book for women! There's a new fuckin' translation! What
the hell kinda students you got at this damn college? Anyway. . . .]

[*Back in character*] I know, I know, the Bible tells me so![®] So, Miss
Jenny, go on and shake a tail feather![®] As the good book, says. . . .

[*He sings a few bars of "Alouette,"[®] perhaps poking and plucking her tail
feather.*]

JENNY

Weren't you gonna quote somethin' there, asshole?

JOHNNO

I was. It's for menfolk to fight their battles and win. We're the ones
gotta take charge.

JENNY

Jesus H. Christ! I don't know what kinda Gospels *you* been readin' but
I, for one, would like to see your fuckin' sources. The text of the Bible is
totally corrupt. People have been stickin' all sorts o' crap in there. [It's
like the goddamn Wikipedia.] So you can take your Gospels and shove
'em up your ass! It's all papal bullshit.²⁰ Plus, I don't buy your interpre-
tation for one damn minute. I object!

JOHNNO

Always playin' some angle. You can't object: men rule the world! It's the
law of the land.²¹ So it all stands to reason and . . . if it don't, I'm fixin'
to make it reasonable. [Logical. Rational.] Might makes right. [Now
shake your ass!]

JENNY

So let it be written, so let it be done? [You're one irrational number!]
You think you just get to threaten me? When donkeys fly! You wanna
know when I'll obey? When I'm dead and buried! [You do the math.]
Because, for now, as long as there's breath in my body, I'm not movin'
an inch. Not one single step!

JOHNNO

Obey me, woman!²²

JENNY

Pal, no way!

JOHNNO

You shall!

JENNY

I shan't! Ain't that just swell!

I'd sooner see you burn in hell

Burn at the stake with all the worst.

JOHNNO

Obey me, woman!

JENNY

Catch me first!²³

JOHNNO

Obey, I say!

JENNY

A stupid lunk?

Like I'd obey a lousy drunk,

Drunk as a skunk all night, all day.

JOHNNO

Gimme some wine!

JENNY

Some other day.

JOHNNO

Put up the soup!

JENNY

No soup for you!²⁴

JOHNNO

My dinner?

JENNY

Yo! Stage left! Your cue.

Go whup your valet's ass, you tool!

JOHNNO

Christ, Jenny! Stubborn as a mule!

The Devil's in you! Hell to pay!

Gimme my beans!

JENNY

No beans today!

JOHNNO

Gimme some *peas*!

JENNY

Nope. Still not shucked.

They're for a pregnant chick.²⁵ No luck.

You don't want her to lose her child.

JOHNNO

The Bible tells. . . . She's got me riled!

Only pain and suffering in this life. Heavenly Father: Is this my cross to bear?²⁶ When shall I be released?[®] What's that old saying again?

[Dang! I think it's in French!] *Besoin fait la vieille trotter.*

[Let's see. . . . If wishes was horses, then . . . you could teach an old dog new tricks . . . because, when you lead her to water you can't make 'er drink . . . on accounta the old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be.[®] . . .

{*The actor breaks character.*} Oh what the fuck! It's your own damn fault I gotta mix metaphors! Would it kill you people to learn French? Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know: If you speak three languages, you're trilingual. If

you speak two languages, you're bilingual. If you speak one language, you're American. Fine. Lemme try this:

You know necessity, right? *La nécessité*? Know how necessity is the mother of invention? The mother. Your momma. Yo mama! *La mère . . . La mère de . . . la mère de la . . . La merde! Merde! Merde!*

Merde! La nécessité, c'est la mère de l'invention. {He neighs like a horse.}

Kinda sounds like "mare," don't it? But *la nécessité*, she's also the *mare* of invention. Get it? Necessity is the mare of invention!]

[*Back in character*] As I was sayin', when the man says "Jump!" old gal's supposed to say "How high?" And she's supposed to trot with all she got. But mine just busts my ass. I guess you could say . . . she's one tough butt to crack, but dang me! They oughta take a rope and hang me!®

Now . . .

Gimme my peas!

JENNY

Just soaked today.

So cook 'em up. Don't got all day.

[*Johnno makes other menacing gestures but chickens out.*]

JOHNNO

Enough to make you blow your. . . Hey!

I'll fix your wagon, yes I will.

God help you, girl, I've had my fill.

[You're gonna see, so cut the sass!]

In three days this shall come to pass.

JENNY

Ain't scared o' you!

JOHNNO

Pain in the ass!

You're scary as a ten-year-old.

JENNY

Just try it, bub, your ass is grass!

Ain't scared o' you.

JOHNNO

Pain in the ass!

I find you, missy, rather crass!

[*To the Audience*] For this, they said a marriage Mass?]

JENNY

I find that this is gettin' old.

Ain't scared o' you!

JOHNNO

Pain in the ass!

You're scary as a ten-year-old.

[*Jenny lunges at him, prompting him to flee the house. More emboldened at a safe distance, Johnno launches a few final salvos and then proceeds to talk to himself as he heads down the road into town.*]

You're such a bitch! You're too damn bold!

You take the knife and twist it in.

She toils not, nor does she spin. . . .

Unless it's webs o' lies, the slut.

I swear, I'll soon show *her* what's what.

If only I could find a way. . . .

[Scene 2]

[*Enter Padre Amadeus*]

PADRE AMADEUS

O sole mio! Va bene!

Friends-a, Romans, countrymen! Lend-a me your *orecchiette*! I am a *virtuoso*! I cure the *dolore d'amore*!

Ay! ay! ay! ay! ay! Amore! Terribile!

JOHNNO

Who's that way over yonder? Looks like a real distinguished gentleman and just in the nick o' time.

PADRE AMADEUS

Va bene!

Va bene, ma que Nicola? No è Nicola!

O sole mio!

Friends-a, Romans, countrymen! Lend-a me your *orecchiette*! I am a *virtuoso*! I cure the *dolore d'amore*!

Ay! ay! ay! ay! Amore! Terribile!

JOHNNO

Praise the Lord, it's a miracle! Sure as He done stop the sun for Charlemagne in the *Song o' Roland*,²⁷ maybe He's sendin' a little advice my way [about marriage. That's one futile system, and] I could sure use me some good counsel. [But *that's* my knight in shining armor?]

PADRE AMADEUS

La donna è immobile! I am-a *consigliore* for *artes amore*. *Madre mia!* I teach-a you the rules of *amore perfetto*. And then the *signorina* . . . how you say? The *esposo*, the man, he break-a her in. *Madre mia! Santa Maria, Nina, e Pinta. Domine Deus, Pater omnipotente!* [With an obscene gesture] *Ma non impotente in amore!*

JOHNNO

[*Disappointed*] Oh. It's Padre Amadeus.²⁸

PADRE AMADEUS

You wanna keep-a *madonna* in line? *Disciplina, disciplina!* She no like? *Boom! Boom! Boom! E presto!*

La donna è mobile? No! No! No! No turn-a—how you say? [He might whack Johnno on the ass.] The other cheek! *Niente! Niente! Madonna è servante! Servante!*

JOHNNO

[*Exasperated*] Yup, Padre Amadeus, all right.

PADRE AMADEUS

Sono maestro! Maestro virtuoso in amore! Como cognoscenti! Molto molto estudio amore. Molto experiencia.

*Sono de Venezia: Venezia!*²⁹ *Venezia è . . . come si dice?* How you say?
Under the *acqua*! She sink, just like-a you! But I teach-a you *amore*
segreti—the secrets of *amore*—*tutti segreti de amore*!

JOHNNO

[*Suddenly seeing the advantage*] Yes siree! It's Padre Amadeus! And just
in the nick o' time! Hey, Padre! Ain't you a sight for sore eyes!
[*He kneels briefly and makes the sign of the cross.*] Bless me, Padre, for. . .
Say! Welcome back to these here parts! You got a minute to stop and
gimme some advice?

PADRE AMADEUS

What? Here? What's-a matter f'you?

[*Throughout this conversation, a paranoid Johnno looks continuously over
his shoulder, fearful that Jenny has given chase and will overhear them.*]

JOHNNO

I need . . . help.

PADRE AMADEUS

"Need." "Need"—a you say. *Molto, molto fortissima parole!* "Need."
Va bene, frater mio. [*He gestures that payment will be required.*] You
tell-a me.

JOHNNO

It's an emergency.
[*In response to the Padre's still outstretched hand, Johnno fishes through
his pockets.*] Cost me a little extra, I know: higher rate applies.
[*To the Audience*] What is this, the Mafia?
Here you go, Padre, a little extra somethin' for your trouble.

PADRE AMADEUS

Normale!
Senti, figlio mio, I help-a you. I get-a you—*come si dice?*—back on-a the
cavallo. . . Back in-a the saddle!

JOHNNO

Boy, oh boy, Padre, it's like I got the Devil in my house. The living Devil, and that's the God's honest truth, I tell you. Gonna be the death o' me yet. I'll tell you straight up, it's my wife. [*Imitating her*] "For as long as there's breath in my body, I won't never move one single step!" And it don't matter what I do—yell and scream, swing at 'er—she won't do nothin' for me. She swore it, Padre, in the name o' the Pope and the King and Lucifer himself! She's says *I'm* the one's gotta wait on *her*! [*He heaves a huge sigh.*]

PADRE AMADEUS

[*He points toward the bridge at the riverbank.*]

Capisco.

How you say? You stuck! You hit-a the—*come si dice?*—the stumbling block. But I, I have-a the solution. . . .

[*Aside to the audience, with no Italian accent whatsoever*] For the stumbling blockhead!

[*To Johnno*] *Vade, tenés le pont aux asgnes. Come si dice?* Get-a your ass in gear! You make-a the *signora* moan? You go to the bridge! *Ponte dei Sospiri!* Bridge of Sighs! Ats-a soon be water under the. . . . Go to the bridge!

JOHNNO

[You ain't in Venice no more, Padre.] And it gits worse. She won't even put the dang soup on, Padre, and I'm the one's gotta go fetch the pail o' water. And then, she takes the name o' the Lord in vain! Cussin' and swearin' that she ain't gonna do no housework, no washin': she don't even make the dang bed! Don't matter what I say: I ain't worth a hill o' beans—which, by the way, Padre, she tells *me* I'm the one's gotta go soak. [No siree, I don't mind tellin' you, Padre, I done fallen outta fava and it's gettin' pretty chili at home. No pun intended.]³⁰

PADRE AMADEUS

[*He points again toward the bridge at the riverbank.*]

Prego! You stuck! *Vade!* Get-a your ass in gear! Ats-a soon be water under the. . . . Go to the bridge!

JOHNNO

And you know what else? She don't treat me no better than you'd treat a dog! I don't get no respect. And—you didn't hear it from me, Padre—you gotta gimme your word, your lips are sealed—'cause everybody knows everybody's business 'round here. . . . Truth is: she's a two-timer. A cheater. And we call that treason. She's worse than Ganelon! [*To the Audience*] Hello! Second reference, there folks: the *Song of Roland*. Hello!]

PADRE AMADEUS

[*He points again toward the bridge.*]

You stuck! *Vade!* Get-a your ass in gear! Ats-a soon be water under the. . . [*Svengaliesque*] Go to the bridge!

JOHNNO

It's like he wants to hypnotize me or somethin'! It's dang spooky if you ask me.

PADRE AMADEUS

[*He points yet again toward the bridge.*]

You stuck! *Vade!* Get-a your ass in gear! Ats-a soon be water under the. . . Go to the bridge!

JOHNNO

Well if that ain't a bridge too far! You mean that there bridge over yonder? Over the Loire? What the heck am I supposed to do out there? Go skeet shootin'?

PADRE AMADEUS

Vade! Get-a your ass in gear! Ats-a soon be water under the. . . Go to the bridge! You go now! You see how it's-a done! *Vada a borda, cazzo!*

JOHNNO

You sure got a bee in your bonnet. Okey-dokey, then, *Monsignor*, fine. I'll go have me a look-see.

[*He mutters under his breath or to the audience as he prepares to part company and head for the bridge, possibly pausing to tie his shoes, take off a jacket or hat, or the like.*]

[Don't know what's so special 'bout that dang bridge. You reckon there might be, duh, some water under it? Golly! What? And if you tell me to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge, you think I'm just gonna do it? Everybody knows they got mostly livestock out there, movin' the donkeys back and forth . . . grass is always greener 'n' all. . . . Takes awhile: mules, they don't like the water none. Well, good golly and what'd I tell you? It's a donkey crossin'! He thinks I don't know jack, but I know me a jackass when I see one.]

[*To the Padre*] I'm goin', I'm goin'! [*He gestures toward the audience.*] And speakin' o' jackasses, what are all them folks lookin' at? Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm a-goin'! I'll have me a look-see. See what all them asses are doin' out there and what folks is doin' to them. I'm goin', Padre! And then I'll have me a thing or two to say about bridges. [Let's see, we got the Bridges o' Madison County. *Ciao*, Francesca! And we got Lloyd Bridges and Jeff Bridges and Beau Bridges. I do reckon one of 'em's kind of an ass.] So, before I—

PADRE AMADEUS

[*He points toward the bridge one last time.*]

Basta! Vada a borda, cazzo! Go to the bridge! *Ecco! Ecco!*

[*{To the audience with no Italian accent whatsoever}* Over there! The bridge over the river Loire! The Bridge over Troubled Water!® The bridge! The bridge! Jeez, next thing you know, this moron thinks it's the card game and bids one no-trump!] Hey, cowboy! Fall off your horse, you git right back on. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

[Scene 3]

[*Enter the Woodsman with his mule, Molly, who is struggling under an enormous pile of wood (sticks, logs, etc.). With much nudging and tongue clucking, he is trying to get her to cross the bridge.*]

The WOODSMAN

Come on, there, Molly! Come on, girl. Git along, little Molly!

Whoopee ti yi yo! Git along!® Hop to it, girl!

Oh, the hell with you! Sweet Jesus, you're a pain in the ass!

Come on, there Molly, come on, girl. Git along, little Molly! Whoopee ti yi yo! Git along!®

JOHNNO

And thar' she blows! Right on cue! I do believe I'll be headin' that-a-way.

The WOODSMAN

Come on, there, Molly! Come on, girl. Git along, little Molly! Whoopee ti yi yo! Git along!®

Oh, the hell with you!

God damn, girl, shake your ass! Now move it before I make glue outta you!³¹

Come on, there, Molly! Come on, girl. Git along, little Molly! Whoopee ti yi yo! Git along!®

[Johnno approaches the Woodsman.]

JOHNNO

Girl ain't gonna take another step.

The WOODSMAN

Come on, there, Molly! Come on, girl. Git along, little Molly! Whoopee ti yi yo! Git along!®

JOHNNO

Hoooeeee! That ass done grown roots!

[Here, the Mule should make a great commotion with frantic braying. This might startle Johnno who, at some point during this scene, should fall into the dirt or mud. The Woodsman then speaks to Molly, Johnno, or both. Certainly, Johnno thinks that he is the one being addressed.]

The WOODSMAN

Shut your goddamn face before I shut it for you! I'll break your damn snout!³² Now step lively!

[He waits as Molly brays.]

JOHNNO

[Nope. Not one single step!]³³ Old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be,[©] you reckon? She don't wanna be no beast o' burden,[©] just like my old lady.

The WOODSMAN

Come on, girl. Move your ass, God damn it! Giddyup! Come on, there, Molly! Or it's really out to pasture with you!

JOHNNO

Old girl does about as much for *her* master as that wife o' mine does for me.

[*Molly brays furiously again.*]

The WOODSMAN

He strikes [her].

The hell you say, girl, the hell you say! You're goin' whether you like it or not! I got me a great big stick here made o' holly,³⁴ and I'll tan your hide!

[*Once again, an alarmed Johnno steps back, afraid that the threat is meant for him.*]

[That's holly, Molly. Holly Molly and holy moly!]

Giddyup, now Molly, giddyup, giddyup! We'll see who's boss around here!

JOHNNO

Holy moly and good golly, Miss Molly![©] You're sure lettin' 'er have it!

The WOODSMAN

Giddyup now, Molly, giddyup, giddyup! All you couples out there, listen up, listen up!

[*Again, with great commotion, Molly moves and crosses the bridge.*]

Hello! If you're married, pay attention! It's the moral of the damn story! [Don't they teach you nothin' at this damn college? Look for the hidden meaning, for God's sake!]

Giddyup, now Molly, giddyup, giddyup! We'll soon see who's boss around here!

JOHNNO

Don't tell me that's it? Nothin' but a stick o' holly to tan the wife's hide?³⁵ Well, boy howdy and praise the Lord 'cause, ready or not, girl, here I come.

[He heads back home, resuming his musing aloud.]

Dang, so that's how you learn 'em! I'm as dumb as a bag o' hammers! That musta been what that wise fella was tryin' to tell me. That's the lesson! Saints alive and holy macaroni, I *was* a jackass! Was that all there was to it? I guess I'm gonna find out.

[He arrives at his front door and steels his courage.] Gonna get my way now!

[Scene 4]

[JOHNNO]

Hello! Hello! Anybody home? I demand my supper this instant!

JENNY

Where the hell you been out gallivantin'³⁶ this time, pea-brain? The beans were all soaked and ready to go.

[As Johnno wields and uses his large stick, there might begin a violent ballet that borders on rape but that looks like square dancing. Its so-called comedy lies in the fact that Johnno is ordering Jenny to effectuate a large number of tasks simultaneously. This is all the more impossible in that he repeatedly tries to "mount" her. Because of all the mounting and dismounting Jenny also has an alarmingly close-up view of his filthy trousers.]

JOHNNO

It's all gonna be water under the bridge, Miss Molly—I mean—"Jenny." I learned me a few things out at the bridge; so get ready to shake your ass, girl! Come on, hop to it! Haul ass! The master's fixin' to have much better service around here so step on it! Get your ass in gear! [Pronto! Do-si-do!]

JENNY

Says who? You? You don't know your ass from a hole in the ground!
Owww! Do-si-do yourself!

JOHNNO

You best watch your mouth when you're talkin' to me.

JENNY

Says who, my lord? You?

JOHNNO

Come on, Jenny, come on, girl! Get the wine. Wash the pots! Clear off all this junk! Set the table!

JENNY

In the name of our living God who gave me life: I'd rather die! What the hell for?

JOHNNO

You best watch your mouth when you're talkin' to me.

JENNY

Says who, my lord? You?

JOHNNO

Says me and my big ol' stick o' holly gonna bust your ass! [And when I run outta holly, I got beech. That's right: life's a beech!] You're in the army now, Ganelon!

[*He attempts to beat her while astride.*]

JENNY

Ow! Ow! My back!

[And would you knock it off with the fuckin' *Song of Roland*. Any idiot can tell these people don't understand the reference!]

Ow! No kidney punches! Help! Murder!

JOHNNO

I done been to the bridge and I seen how *it's-a done!* I know how to whup 'em into line now. Git along, little Jenny, git along!®

JENNY

Stop! Jonathan! You're gonna kill me!

JOHNNO

I done been to the bridge, you bet your ass! Now: how's about that hill o' beans, hmmm? You gonna haul ass and cook 'em up? I done been to the bridge and I seen how *it's-a done!* I know how to whup 'em into line now. Git along, little Jenny, git along!®

JENNY

Stop! I give up! I'll go light the stove. You saw how *it's-a done?* [I'll make you a goddamn risotto.]³⁷ [*Johnno raises his stick again.*] Lord have mercy! The beans. I'll fry 'em up in a pan [and never, ever let you forget you're a man. 'Cause I'm a woman, W-O-M-A-N. Now say it again.®] I'll honor and obey, from this day forward.

[*He mounts Jenny.*]

JOHNNO

[*To the audience*] Watch and learn! Old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be? Ride 'em, cowboy!

[*To Jenny*] And you'll serve like I tell you!

JENNY

Ow! Watch the ribs.

JOHNNO

Ride 'em, cowboy!

JENNY

Lemme help you out of those filthy clothes. I'll go draw you a bath.

JOHNNO

Ride 'em, cowboy! And you'll serve, like I tell you!

[Doubled verse version begins here.]

Giddyup, old girl, giddyup, giddyup!
And when I say "Jump!" then you say "How high?"

JENNY

Watch the ribs. Good God! That's enough! That's enough!

JOHNNO

Giddyup, old girl, giddyup, giddyup!

JENNY

Lemme get you cleaned up, get you outta that stuff!
Gonna draw you a bath and I think you know why!

JOHNNO

Giddy up, old girl, giddyup, giddyup!
And when I say "Jump!" then you say "How high?"

[Doubled verse version ends here.]

JENNY

Hey there, Mustang Sallies,[©] listen up to your guys!
Outta need, we old gals gotta heed. Giddyup!
You've just seen it played out at the Bridge! Bridge o' Sighs:
Gotta trot, gals, with all that we got! That's enough!

JOHNNO

To you gents out there, gonna bid you good-bye.
And I hope that you're glad that you listened right up.
You've just seen it played out at the Bridge! Bridge o' Sighs:
Gotta trot, gals, with all that you got! That's enough!³⁸

The END

6.

Match, Point, Counterpoint, or, The Old Lover vs. the Young Lover Le Viel Amoureux et le Jeune Amoureux

CAST OF CHARACTERS

WAYNE NEWSON, the OLD LOVER (Le Viel Amoureux)

BEAU JEST, the YOUNG LOVER (Le Jeune Amoureux)

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce à deux personnages du viel Amoureux et du jeune Amoureux*, *Farce à .II. personnages* appears as #9 in the *Recueil La Vallière*. It was published in several older editions: Fournier, *TFR*, 382–85; Mabile, *CFSM*, 2: 255–69; and as #7 in vol. 1 of Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, *RFMSJ*, which is the edition that I follow (and which is slightly mispaginated). As noted above, I cite *RFMSJ* by volume and page number alone. Helpful plot summaries appear in Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #211 (256–57); and in Faivre, *Répertoire*, #172 (430). This anonymous play is 158 verses per Faivre and 161 per Petit de Julleville. To my knowledge, there is no English or modern French translation.

Plot

Onstage, a young man and an old man are in the midst of an intense debate about (what else?) love, as followed—or preceded—by sex, marriage, both, or neither. The older guy, sadder but wiser, is losing his manly vigor. For him, women are devils. The younger guy is willing and eager, all dressed up and ready to go. For him, women are angels. Petit de Julleville even goes so far as to surmise that the youthful lad embodies the sentiments of the poet himself (*RTC*, 257). Eventually, the two gents will sound a harmonious note of agree-

ment about one thing only—and not before going tit for tat the length of the play: mommy's love. That's right: both boys love their mamas.

Although the theme of their debate is fairly conventional—Do love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?⁶—there is nothing conventional about the performance possibilities of its variations. As the two men speak to each other *in song*,¹ any convention is quickly rendered unconventional; and such unconventionality will soon be made manifest in one of my bolder adaptations (below, note 7). Once sung, even the most enshrined musical cliché ceases to be one (see “Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials”).

Harking back to the tradition of medieval French *puy*s (poetry contests) and to the lyric genre known as the *joc parti*, *jeu parti*, or *tenson* of the troubadours and *trouvères*, this is a play that stages age versus youth in literal counterpoint. To paraphrase the celebrated line from *Annie Get Your Gun*, anything one can sing, the other can sing better.⁶ If the Old Lover says “yes,” the Young Lover says “no”; or, if you prefer how Abelard would have said it, *sic et non*, pro and con. As the two men give one another the proverbial song and dance, they sing *against* one another, the technical meaning of *counterpoint*. That practice, oft theatricalized in medieval French farce, demonstrates the inextricability of music, poetry, dialogue, dance, and drama. Consider the case of *The Cobbler Who Answers Only in Song* (*Recueil Cohen*, #37, 287–94), in which the title character argues with his wife by quoting from popular ditties. Or, more aptly, consider the epic, musical “pilgrimage” of marriage enlivened by our title cut, #7, *Holy Deadlock*.

Precisely in order to capture it all, I've titled our play *Match, Point, Counterpoint* and, believe it or not, there is nothing anachronistic about the tennis metaphor. A fifteenth-century image of the precursor to the game (*pelota*) survives in British Library MS. Harley 4375 (Figure 4), depicting a match in a monastic cloister.² Plus, the metaphor worked just swell for Rabelais, who ended *Gargantua* with a famous enigma that, when properly interpreted by exegetes or literary critics, symbolized either oh-so-ethereally an obscurely prophetic apocalypse or oh-so-materially a game of tennis (in *Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 127–30). Are you thinking, “Big deal”?

In fact, it's a very big deal. Especially since the handful of scholars who have discussed *Le Viel Amoureux et le jeune amoureux* have largely missed the musical dimensions that make potential performances so interesting. Worse yet, in a critical scenario akin to that which long camouflaged the origins of medieval drama itself, they see the evidence only to discount it.³

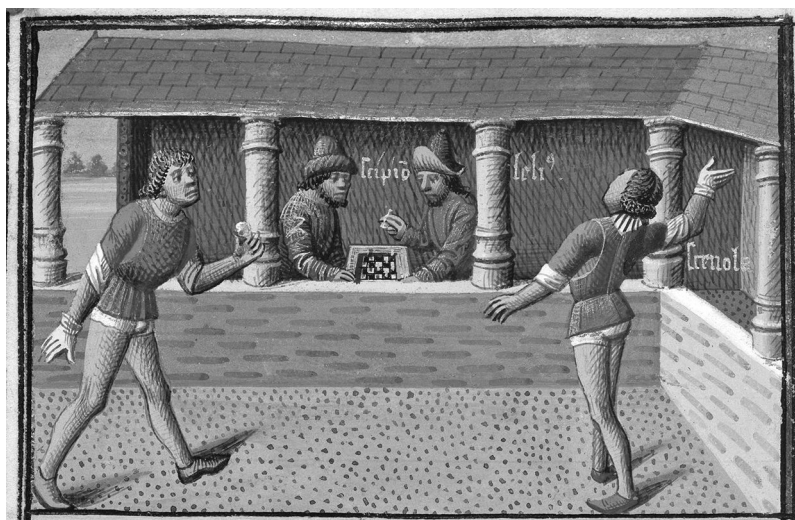


Figure 4. Medieval tennis. From British Library MS. Harley 4375, fol. 151v. French version of Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, by Simon de Hesdin and Nicolas de Gonesse. Detail of a miniature of Scipio and Leulius playing chess while Scaevola plays pelota.

For Fournier, the play is “nothing more than a dialogue” (*TFR*, 382), even though he acknowledges in the same breath that such a protracted, poetic parry as the *Debate Between the Body and the Soul* was brought to life in Amiens in 1489 (*TFR*, 382). Elsewhere, Petit de Julleville duly notes the similarities of *Match*, *Point*, *Counterpoint* to contemporaneous dialogic poetry, only to proclaim it a closet drama “not ordinarily destined for performance.” At the same time that he affirms its lively scenography, he backs off from that affirmation in his subsequent sentence: “Our farce is a lively and animated dialogue with rich scenic possibilities even though its plot is nil and there is no action” (*RTC*, 257). Even the normally tolerant Faivre agrees about the lack of drama: “The debate remains at a purely rhetorical level, with neither conflict nor dramatic progression. Doubtless, it might have lent itself to public recitation, but it is hardly a play and even less so a farce” (*Répertoire*, 430).

Not so.

They say *to-ma-to* and I say *to-mah-to*.⁶ In *Match*, *Point*, *Counterpoint*, the rhetorical verve of the musical counterpoint *is* the dramatic action. Above and beyond its already ebullient and perhaps over-the-top musicality, there are few entities more theatrical than medieval rhetoric in performance. The

French Middle Ages inherited from antiquity the beloved contrapuntal and often histrionic rhetoric of legal debate and disputation (*ROMD*, 88–110). And, if you're still thinking "big deal," then allow me to point out that to miss the music is to miss this:

For one thing, the play offers to musicologists a veritable treasure trove of evidence insofar as each man's riposte takes up what is clearly a line, a verse, or a refrain from a popular song. For another thing, I contend that these moments are actually call-outs for musical numbers, cues for the songs to be sung. Some of those songs are identifiable today; others are not. Some of the Middle French lyrics quoted are clearly titles; others might be refrains or favorite lines. No matter how much (or how little) of the song appears in the original text, much more of it could have been sung during any given performance. Just bear this in mind: in *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, the whole thing is bling, with the campiest of song-and-dance routines (§ "Sets and Staging"). Start by picturing the contrapuntal one-upmanship of "Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better."⁶ Then, move to wedding banquets, another great medieval tradition that boasted theatrical entertainment. Then move to Vegas.

Then move to another idea. Remember Faivre's critique of the seemingly anodyne #1, *The Newlywed Game* (*Répertoire*, 114–15)? That it was probably a wedding farce in that it would have offended no one? For my own part, I think that *Match, Point, Counterpoint* is likely a kind of *farce de noces* as well—but not the staid, aristocratic medieval wedding that we moderns have been fed. Surely there were other types of banqueting by those who couldn't afford a catered affair. Therefore, in keeping with the generation gap that is the very essence of this play, I submit that it can be most stimulating—and most comedy-friendly—to conceive a raucous conjugal affair that is itself designed to parody what a so-called lower-class wedding might look like. Think the immersive dinner-theater phenomenon known as *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* (in New York, Chicago, or Las Vegas). Think "lounge singer" or Billy Murray's *SNL* version of one. Think Andy Kaufman's creepy alter ego, "Tony Clifton." Again, think Vegas. But think something else too. . . .

What about a wedding that would have offended *everyone*, as *Match, Point, Counterpoint* does with some pretty blue language? I invite you to imagine, as I did in #1, that you're hosting Kathy Griffin at your wedding. And, speaking of which: given the homoerotic subtexts invoked above, what about a gay wedding? Or a gay wedding in a state where it's legal for a businessperson to decline to do the flowers or bake the cake for the happy couple? Marriage is a social, economic, political, and religious contract, a medieval sacrament that

farce hardly holds sacred. The very politics of marriage are never far behind, which, to my mind, is the key to capturing the timelessness of our play.

Characters and Character Development

In keeping with the Strip, I've called the Old Lover "Wayne Newson" in honor of the Vegas fixture and in order to facilitate a pun or two. The text also provides evidence about his physical appearance. Much like the Old Pilgrim of our next play, he is thin, wan, bent, and broken. As for the Young Lover, who is hotheaded, impulsive, and effeminate, I've called him "Beau Jest"; and you'll soon see why. In service of characterization, I have exaggerated somewhat the two characters' speech patterns, consistent with the harmonious disharmony between the two. It seemed fitting that old Wayne would pontificate with more archaic language than young Beau's frank, vulgar, colloquial vernacular. Above all, the key to both characters is the musical key: major (Beau) or minor (Wayne), *allegro* or *lacrimoso*. As they say on *American Idol*, it's all about song choice.

For Wayne, the grand musical theme is pain and suffering. His song choices should be as dated as he is. When he is sad about cheating women, country music will do the trick. He prefers golden oldies, which made him easier for me to score (albeit harder for *him* to "score"). He is always already outdated, just as he is set in his musical ways. Moreover, his old-hat tastes make for the perfect counterpoint with young Beau, who finds them a source of great amusement.

When Beau pronounces himself ready to dive headfirst into love, rap might be more appropriate. Or he can hum a few bars of pretty much anything on the pop charts. In contradistinction to Wayne, that makes him much harder for *me* to score (and presumably much easier for *him* to "score" with the gals. At least so *he* claims). His tuneful selections must remain absolutely current, the epitome of up-to-date; but by the time you read this aging translation, his songs will already have become yesterday's news, having risen and fallen along with the sex lives of these characters. And yet, within that difficulty there lies an advantage because, musically speaking, Beau can do it all. If he sings anything resembling a golden oldie, then he does so to ridicule the failing Old Lover. (This sort of thing worked wonders for Fred Armisen and Kristen Wiig in the Lawrence Welk send-up on *SNL*.) Alternatively, Beau could be using dated songs with less sarcasm and for purposes of communicating with Wayne in the only musical language that the poor codger understands.

The point is that each character self-identifies—and identifies himself for the audience—through his lyrics. Song choice reveals who they are and who they are not. While I have translated their choices to the best of my ability, and have made myriad suggestions as to modern equivalents, actors will re-animate these characters in accordance with their own musical sensibilities. As always, do be warned that any actual singing requires clearance of all attached copyrights.

Language

As is typical in medieval French farce, we encounter primarily octosyllabic verse; but, in the musically complex *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, the verse is limited neither to rhyming couplets nor to eight-foot lines. Sometimes, the debate between Wayne and Beau unfolds in eight and twelve-verse structures called *huitains* and *douzains*;⁴ sometimes, in a pattern that we have seen before (#2, #3, #5), its one-two-three rhythm sounds like a waltz. Indeed, when Wayne opens with a twenty-three-verse set piece, his song is so reminiscent of François Villon's beautifully oxymoronic "Ballade du Concours de Blois" that I've parodied another well-known set piece in its stead (below, § "Sets and Staging").⁵ The better to highlight the pervasive poetic counterpoint, I have opted for verse in the set pieces and prose for the rest.

Also noteworthy: a mythological subtext that includes the God of Love, a major protagonist in the *Romance of the Rose*, as well as tales of those who perished on account of love (Dido or Leander).⁶

Sets and Staging

Sets can be as pared down or as elaborate as befits the dramaturgical imagination. It's two men talking against whatever background best captures the spirit of the production. The sine qua non of staging this play is the way in which its music inflects the action. It all depends on how Wayne and Beau perform. Do they dance? If so, is it tap? ballet? break dancing? One could almost stage the play as an opera. Or a Broadway musical. Or a drag show. My approach takes its cue from the time-honored farcical strategy of exaggeration, and by that I mean high camp. The question was how to render it.

Taking the lion's share of my liberties with the poetic set pieces, I've opted for several musical strategies, notably for the possibilities of opening and closing numbers. To preserve something of the wedding-banquet atmosphere, I

recommend an opening interlude before the play proper begins. One option is a pantomime devoted to love; a second is a variety of love-themed songs representing different eras and perspectives; a third is a dance; and a fourth might combine all three of the preceding options, all giving rise to whatever age-appropriate production numbers fit the bill. (One could consider, for example, “Crazy Love,”[©] “You Give Love a Bad Name,”[©] “Girls Just Want to Have Fun,”[©] “Goldigger,”[©] “Good Lovin’,”[©] and the like.) The point is to give Love the song-and-dance that it—make that *he*—deserves. *Amour* is gendered male, as is the God of Love himself, which made it both fun and fitting to insinuate nonheteronormative engagements. There is no reason that a distinguishedly graying Wayne and a pretty-boy Beau couldn’t be attracted to members of the same sex. Or to each other.

Costumes and Props

Costume can be used to make Wayne appear as old, bent, and broken as Beau is foppish, effeminate, and perhaps bi. For Wayne, the text intimates a threadbare wardrobe that is much more than last season; for Beau, it conjures conspicuous jewelry and as much bling as possible. But, as with the play’s sets, costume and props will be cued by the gents’ song and dance.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by [©] within the text)

“Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off.” By George and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP Work ID: 42003061.

“Crazy Love.” By Russell Young. ASCAP Work ID: 330259797.

“You Give Love a Bad Name.” By John F. Bongiovi, Desmond Child, and Richard F. Sambora. ASCAP Work ID: 550147303.

“Girls Just Want to Have Fun.” By Victor Carstarphen, Robert Hazard, Cyndi Lauper, Gene McFadden, Richard David Morel, John Cavadas Whitehead. ASCAP Work ID: 372137750.

“Goldigger.” By Kanye West. BMI Work #7583980.

“Good Lovin’.” By Rudy Clark and Arthur Resnick. BMI Work #494823.

“Love Will Keep Us Together.” By Howard Greenfield and Neil Sedaka. BMI Work #928522.

“Lay Lady Lay.” By Bob Dylan. SESAC Work Number: 514963.

- "Big Spender." By Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields. ASCAP Work ID: 320137955.
- "If Loving You Is Wrong." By Homer Banks, Carl Mitchell Hampton, and Raymond Earl Jackson. BMI Work #705238.
- "Money Makes the World Go Round." By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #2592542.
- "It Don't Mean a Thing." Edward Kennedy [Duke] Ellington and Irving Mills. ASCAP Work ID: 390148428.
- "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'." By George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, and DuBose Heyward. ASCAP Work ID: 390020583.
- "All Night Long." By Lionel Richie. ASCAP Work ID: 310227957.
- "After the Lovin'." By Alan Bernstein and Richard Adam Ziegler. ASCAP Work ID: 310145974.
- "Crazy in Love." By Shawn Carter, Richard Christopher Harrison, Beyoncé Knowles, and Eugene Booker Record. BMI Work #6483135.
- "Man of Constant Sorrow." Traditional.
- "I Kissed a Girl." By Catherine Roseanne Dennis, Lukasz Gottwald, Katy Perry, and Martin Karl Sandburg. ASCAP Work ID: 393213431.
- "Stumbling." By Z[ez] Confrey. ASCAP Work ID: 882062133.
- "Poor, Poor Pitiful Me." By Warren Zevon. BMI Work #1189347.
- "Edelweiss." By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 350007977.
- "Mad Love." By Mark Goldenberg. BMI Work #940762.
- "Get Over It." By Glenn Frey and Don Henley. BMI Work #2002781.
- "Hard to Handle." By Alvertis Isbell, Allen Alvoid Jones Jr., and Otis Redding. BMI Work #526855.
- "Dar's Love." ["Habanera" from *Carmen Jones*, as adapted from Georges Bizet's *Carmen*.] By Roger Russell Bennett, Georges Bizet, Ludovic Halevy, and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 40005430.
- "Let Me Entertain You." By Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne. ASCAP Work ID: 420022317.
- "What I Did for Love." By Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Lawrence Kleban. ASCAP Work ID: 530197994.
- "Company." By Stephen Sondheim. ASCAP Work ID: 330178302.
- "Rock Island." By Meredith Willson. MPL Music Communications.
- "Love and Marriage." By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen. ASCAP Work ID: 420081361.

“Anything You Can Do.” By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 310056043.
“You Light Up My Life.” By Joe Brooks. ASCAP Work ID: 550087093.
“Glamorous.” By William Adams, Christopher Bridges [Ludacris], Stacy
Ferguson [Fergie], Jamal Jones, Micaiah Raheem, and Elvis Williams.
BMI Work #8561329.

[Opening Interlude]

*[As two age-appropriate tunes play in the background, the play might open with a mimed performance, a tennis match, or the parody I propose in the accompanying note.]*⁷

[Scene 1]

The OLD LOVER, WAYNE, *begins with a song [in a minor key]*

A loving man should die here on the spot.
O lord, have mercy! Lovers have such pain.
My body's on a pyre with flames so hot
They sear, they scorch: I'm going to go insane.
That's how Love pains the pained. Lord, I'm in pain!
I'd rather die than live with all the pain.
My good, chaste life: I threw it all away!
Alas, the awful price I've had to pay!
I erred, I led a life of mortal sin.
My only song was this: “Lay lady lay.”⁸
I squandered honor, virtue every day.
I'm no longer upstanding. I can't win.

For happiness, I've sorrow and chagrin.
For joy, delight, I've trouble without end,
For good times, I've this misery I'm in.
For worldliness, a heart that ne'er shall mend.
For glory, I have God's own malediction.
It's only right; they got me in the end.

All just deserts for men without conviction.
Yes, crazy love is evil: that's no fiction.
It's shame and retribution. Don't you see?
We're prisoners of love. No contradiction.
Man's cross to bear.⁸

BEAU

Dude. No. I disagree.
Love's one big party. Yo! It's fun and games.
Dude. It's good times. Totally orgasmic. And the hits just keep on
comin'. Party on, Wayne.

WAYNE

Hey, big spender![®] Only if you're ready to put up some dough. That's
how you spend a little time with the ladies.

BEAU

And I say, what really turns the "ladies" on is a good time and a little bit
o' good conversation. There's nothin' ain't good about love. [*He might
pause to ponder his double negative.*] You could say that, if lovin' 'em is
wrong, I don't wanna be right.^{®9}

WAYNE

It's money makes the world go round.[®] Cold hard cash. It don't mean a
thing if you ain't got that bling.[®]

BEAU

Yo, senior citizen, shut your face! 'Cause, before I leave here today,
you're gonna eat your words. You'll soon be singin' a different tune.¹⁰

WAYNE *sings*

A lover's got plenty o' nuttin'.[®] [And nothin' ain't plenty for me.]

BEAU

Some got plenty o' plenty.[®]

WAYNE

How do you figure?

BEAU

Got enough joy juice to keep it goin' day and night. All night long.®

WAYNE

But what about after the lovin'?® A man's all spent. But he still has to be a regular gold mine.

BEAU

Only when some fool hooks up with a gold digger just lookin' for a sugardaddy. [You know, like Adult FriendFinder?] A real lady don't do a man like that. And when he comes around, she's all in. Sing it for me, baby:

[*Here begins the literal counterpoint of singing against one another.*]

"When you leave, I'm beggin' you not to go."®11

WAYNE

And I go: "I am a man of constant sorrow."®

BEAU

"I kissed a girl and I liked it."®

WAYNE

"Stumbling . . ."®

BEAU

"I kissed a girl just to try it. It felt so . . ."®

WAYNE

"Poor, poor pitiful me!"®

BEAU

I'm singin' here!

WAYNE

I'm cryin' here!

And, oh, the pain! I'm just a burned-out shell of a man.

BEAU

You don't find me all happy? You don't find me all gay?

WAYNE

You don't find me depressed? Wallowing in despair?

BEAU

I'm as happy as a baby with a mouthful o' tit.

WAYNE

And I'm dyin' on the vine . . . just rotting away. Pale and skinny, bent and broken. I can barely stand on my own two feet.

BEAU

Dude. Seriously. When are you gonna give it up? You're really gonna dis Love?

WAYNE

I've got nothing good to say about it. Love's what did this to me. [My flag's flying at half-staff.]

BEAU

If you woulda known how to do it, old man, you'da been bloomin' and growin' till the day you die.[©] In fact, you'd be in the damn Elysian fields by now.

WAYNE

It's Love that sent a certain someone to bring me down so low. I've written a little song about her, and it goes something like this:

[He sings and dances.]

Alas! Of my sad, sorry fate,

To you, my beauty, I lament.

You take advantage of my state

O! Winter of my discontent!

Broken and bent

To the extent

I don't belong

Please: don't you see?

It seems to me
She done me wrong.
Many a man's abused and wronged
For loving well with noble heart.¹²

BEAU

Many a man stands tall, stands strong. Sows plenty o' wild oats, old fart!

WAYNE

Many a man reaps what he sows.
Don't start.

BEAU

Dude. Every man has to do his duty by Love. It's what gives a man the power to keep on keepin' on.

WAYNE

Not so! It's all damage, destruction, and despair. Remember Dido, the Queen of Carthage? She went crazy and killed herself. And Leander drowned himself in a watery grave. [It's mad, mad love.®]

BEAU

Dude. You can't judge by the fools. They don't understand love. But you gotta give it up for all the other guys who took a chance, smart enough to give it their best shot.

WAYNE

Come on, kid, surely you're not telling me that you fail to see how many a man gets ruined by it every single day.

BEAU

Get over yourself. So what if they shot their wad on some stupid bitch! Now, if they woulda known the good lovin'® you can get off a real lady, they wouldn'ta been done like that. Pathetic bunch o' dicks!¹³

WAYNE

Women treat us like dogs! Always bitchin' and moanin' and pitchin' a fit,® givin' us a hard time.

BEAU

Dude. A hard time? Hello. Oh, yeah! Real hard. Women are discreet and they sure can keep a secret.

Pretty little things come and light your candle 'cause mama ain't so hard to handle.®

Females is hot! And there's plenty of 'em. Foxy ladies always got a kind word on those ruby-red lips. [You might say females is bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.] Dude. Chicks is damn classy. Elegant.

[WAYNE

Arrogant.

BEAU

Lovely.

WAYNE

A bad investment. And fickle too.}]¹⁴

BEAU

They're sweet as sugar.¹⁵

WAYNE

They're the Devil incarnate.

BEAU

There's hope for 'em yet. They help a guy out of a jam.¹⁶

WAYNE

No, they're unreasonable. And downright uppity.

[One more time?]

[*Doubled version begins here.*]¹⁷

Women are just mean.

Always make a scene.

Never playing clean.

There's no in-between.

Hurt is all they do!

BEAU

Women need to preen.
Pretty little queens
Keep the goods unseen.
You say “bill and coo.”
I say: “What a view!”
Balls are never blue!
Do it! Push on through!
Make you feel brand-new.
And the stuff they say.
[Know just what to do.]

WAYNE

Arrogant! A shrew!

[BEAU]

Chocolate fondue!

WAYNE

What a price to pay!
Fickle and *blasé*.

BEAU

Girls just like to play.

WAYNE

She-devils! No way!

BEAU

Hope for 'em, I say!

WAYNE

Just lead you astray!
Noses in the air.

[*Doubled version ends here.*]

BEAU

Dude. That's just not fair.

No way. Who was it that raised us when we were babies? And fed us and nursed us and wiped our little bottoms? And gave us our bath and dried us off and dressed us up? Kept us clean, body and soul?

Yes...? I can't hear you!

WAYNE

Well, I'll admit, it was women.

BEAU

Damn straight! And who gave us our bottle? And suckled us? And put our baby food on those tiny little spoons? Sweet as goddamn mad-eleines! Here comes the airplane, open up the hangar!

Yes...? I can't hear you!

WAYNE

Well, I'll admit, it was women.

BEAU

It's Love perks a real man right up. Turns a fool into a wise man, an ass into an ass man, a dick into a stand-up guy, and even an old guy [like you] into a player.

WAYNE

True love never entered the mind of any player. And you can take that to the bank.

BEAU

So shut the fuck up, then!

WAYNE

Okey-dokey. Mum's the word.

BEAU

So? Final answer?

WAYNE

[*Practically choking on his words*] That it's the path of peace and grace and harmony, and it leads to holy wedlock. It's the enemy of strife and discord. And, it's the way we receive mercy from our Lord—and from God's own mama, Mary.

BEAU

I also seem to remember something about men getting married because they're *in love*.

WAYNE

[*He speaks to the audience too while passing the hat to ask for financial contributions.*]

Dat's love!® It brings good people together for a real good time, yes sir.® So, at this stage o' the game, I might as well just give it up for Love. [Yes sir, I'm ready to cash in my chips.] I loved Love, even though it made me die a thousand deaths. I guess I might as well just go on home and get over it,® so. . . . Kiss today goodbye and point me toward tomorrow.®

[*He might do an entire number as Wayne passes the hat again.*]

That's right, folks! Time that we be on our way
Adieu. . . . Wait! We've got one more thing to say:

[*Doubled version begins here for the curtain call.*]¹⁸

[Bells ring, door chimes, in comes company!
No strings, good times, room hums, company!®]

Now, I know some o' you folks out there are way too young to know this little tune from my day. But parody is parody. If you don't recognize the damn object of imitation, you'll just have to get over it!¹⁹

Love. Love will keep us together,®
Think o' me folks, whenever
Some sweet-talkin' gal comes along
Singin' a song. Don't watch me now folks,
Ain't no longer strong. . . .
I gotta stop! 'Cause I really loved Love.
Stop! Help me, Lord, Lord above.

Look how she did me but Love
Keeps us together.
Whatever.
Bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye.
I'm on my way.
Lickin' my wounds.
Some other day. . . .
Bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye.]

[Doubled version ends here.]

*[The Entire Company might close with yet more songs in the form of an
encore.]*

The END

7.

Holy Deadlock, or, The Pilgrimage of Marriage Le Pèlerinage de mariage

CAST OF CHARACTERS

[BIDDY and the PILGRIMETTES, i.e.] (Les Trois Pèlerines)¹
BIDDY, the OLD PILGRIMESS, or the FIRST PILGRIMESS, a
Spinster (La Vie[il]le / La Première Pèlerine)
JUICY LUCY, the SECOND PILGRIMESS (La Deuxième Pèlerine)
PRUDENCE, the THIRD PILGRIMESS (La Troisième Pèlerine)
The OLD PILGRIM (Le Viel Pèlerin)
The YOUNG PILGRIM (Le Jeune Pèlerin)
[A number of Extras: A Band Leader plus various Priests, Bishops, and
perhaps the Pope himself for the final production number]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Farce à cinq personnages, c'est à scavoir le pèlerinage de mariage; le pèlerin, les trois pèlerines, et le jeune pèlerin, appears as #19 in the *Recueil La Vallière* and it exists today in three editions: as #19 in vol. 1 of Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, *RFMSJ*; in Emile Picot's *Recueil Général de Sotties (RGS)*, 3: 269–300; and in Michel Rousse's unpublished *thèse d'état, Le Théâtre des farces en France au Moyen Âge (TFFMA)*, 2: 215–79.² Although Rousse's edition is superior in all respects, it is highly inaccessible, making for a difficult determination as to which source might best facilitate consultation of the Middle French. For the sake of consistency within this volume, I've opted to follow Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, continuing to cite *RFMSJ* by volume and page number only. But I also amplify the critical apparatus with verse

numbers from Picot's *RGS* and with most welcome lessons from Rousse's *TFFMA*. For this complex play, Petit de Julleville's helpful plot summary (*RTC*, #165, 210–11) is supplemented by the extensive descriptions in both Rousse (*TFFMA*, 2: 216–32) and Picot (*RGS*, 3: 269–74), both of whom attend seriously to the manuscript, its interpretation, and its performance history. Curiously, Faivre neither summarizes nor even mentions this fascinating play in his *Répertoire*. Perhaps he found it insufficiently farcical, which is odd, given that Picot deemed it “foolish” enough to qualify as a *sottie*.

The anonymous *Pèlerinage* is written in rhyming, mostly octosyllabic verse with the occasional change to decasyllables, prompting my corresponding use of Anglophone-friendly pentameter. To my knowledge, there is no modern French or English translation.

Performance History

Fortuitously, we know something about several performances of our play in Rouen; and it's not pretty. Thanks largely to the recuperative work of Edouard Gosselin, whose *Recherches sur les origines et l'histoire du théâtre à Rouen* (1868) still contains buried treasure, we pick up its trace as the *Retour de mariage*. The illustrious trio of Petit de Julleville, Picot, and Rousse share the presumption that this is an alternate title for the *Pèlerinage du mariage*.³

As with so many extant records of the medieval theater, *Holy Deadlock* makes an entrance into the historical record because of trouble with the law and, in this instance, with the censor of Rouen. Precious evidence survives in two extant edicts or *Arrêts du Parlement* from the Archives of the Palais de Justice of Rouen, one issued on 25 October 1556, the other on 27 January 1558. Both were reproduced by Gosselin (*Recherches*, 41–44); both were cited and analyzed by Picot (*RGS*, 3: 271–74); and both constitute remarkable documents in theater history. Together, the two edicts target such material and institutional conditions of the stage as these: the obligation to seek permission to perform; anxieties related to itinerant actors and the “repertoire of these foreigners [strangers, or outsiders]”; the challenges of theatrical financing (as in how to make back in receipts a company's considerable outlay for such necessities as silk fabric); the repercussions of noisy advertising on Sundays, which disturbed the divine offices; and the demand that the players comport themselves “correctly and modestly” (*honnestement et modestement*).⁴ More specifically, on 24 October 1556, the Parliament of Rouen had sought to forbid a troupe from staging the *Retour du mariage*; and, in January of

1558, the play's probable author and director came once again to the censor's attention. The leader of the troupe was one Pierre Carpentier, aka Le Pardonneur, a cantor in the Church of Saint Vivien and, quoth Rousse, he was no stranger to the law (*TFFMA*, 2: 216–18). Carpentier was enjoined from putting on the play “because these performances led to frivolous and useless expenditures.” Moreover, the earlier parliamentary intervention had itself been marked by drama when, in response to the troupe's first offense in 1556, the police executed the medieval equivalent of an arrest warrant *in the middle of a performance* of *The Life of Job*.⁵ Administrative review of the case resulted in the decision that, thereafter, the following restrictions would apply: on Sundays, the troupe could perform only after Vespers; and there was to be no playing of tambourines or other noise-making instruments to drum up an audience. The show could go on. But not the *entire show*. Under no circumstances was the troupe to perform *La Farce du Retour de mariage* (Gosselin, *Recherches*, 41–44).

The trials of Job were okay but not the trials of marriage? What was the problem exactly? Could it be heresy? Could it be blasphemy? Could it be Satan?

As we shall see, in a play that boasts such priceless lines as “God was no doo-fus!” city officials cannot have taken kindly to the satire of liturgical prayers. To add insult to injury, theater audiences were clearly being invited and incited to *join in* sacrilegious parodies of Christian worship and ritual processions.⁶ It seems that, when it came to the sacrament of marriage and to any good pilgrim's progress, the pilgrimage itself was the problem. Men and women were damned if they did and damned if they didn't, both on the stage and off.

Plot

A woman past her prime and three young ladies of diverse character wish to land a husband. They meet two men much like those whom we have just met in #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, and from whom they seek advice. An Old Lover and a Young Lover offer differing perspectives and the occasional debate about the pilgrim's path to marriage as, before the eyes of an audience, the medieval version of two roads diverge (in a yellow wood?). The best man wins and, not surprisingly, it's the younger more impetuous one. Naturally, he prefers the low road and, at the end of the play, the Company sets off with him. That's the plot in a nutshell. It also goes nuts. And, I give you fair warning: so too does my critical apparatus. *Holy Deadlock* defies translation. It pretty much defies everything.

Unless you're in the habit of consulting relatively obscure French materials, you will find essentially no information on *Holy Deadlock* in any English-language source and, to use the lingo of the play, it's a damn shame. In this long, zany play, what starts out as an almost spiritual meditation quickly devolves into an invitation to the bawdiest of pilgrimages, this one, to the titular state of holy wedlock. It's all quite the amazing journey[®] and a misogynistic one at that. (There is a strong implication, for instance, that women whore themselves out along the way.) It's also searingly satirical and potentially anticlerical. When you sally forth, think Chaucer, *Spamalot*, and follow me.

With multiple song-and-dance routines, the quest for the holy married state is one helluva pilgrimage or, as they call it on ABC's *The Bachelor*, a "journey." (Even when contestants embark upon the latter "for the right reasons," their journey normally leads to deadlock rather than wedlock). Whence, my ungodly dramaturgical suggestions (below, § "Sets and Staging") for the play's long and winding road[®] to marriage, a metaphor that likewise endured cartographically well into the seventeenth century as the map to love, or *Carte du Tendre*, in Georges Moustaki's twentieth-century ballad, "La Carte du Tendre,"^{®7} and even in Norman Juster's remapped return to Rhyme and Reason in *The Phantom Tollbooth*.

Last but not least, the *Pèlerinage* is a highly self-conscious piece of work that ever reveals the author's or authors' full awareness of its status as parable. I have in mind a different social and legal journey that will emerge in the ensuing discussion. Given the ubiquitous glee with which the play dispenses with popular pieties and chases rainbows (you'll see), it wouldn't be the least bit out of line to cross-cast the whole journey as an allegory of gay marriage.

Characters and Character Development

Music, play, song, and dance will dominate the *Pèlerinage* (below, § "Sets and Staging"); so I've drawn inspiration from Motown and rendered the three *pèlerines*—Lady Pilgrims or "Pilgrimesses"—as Biddy and the Pilgrimettes. At the appropriate times, they morph into an honest-to-God singing group. Otherwise, in keeping with my predilection for reversing medieval gender reversals, I've christened the unnamed female characters only, allowing the two male characters to remain nameless everymen.

The First Pilgrimess, or the "Old Lady" Pilgrimess, is a spinster who is plainly older than the other two ladies, an old "Biddy." Excessively polite but also sexually frustrated, she tries way too hard to be appealing to the menfolk

who cross her path. In fact, for as much as our play reprises the now familiar old versus young divide, one might have expected that the Old Pilgrim and the Old Pilgrimage would join forces. Not happening. Poor Biddy repels men of all ages. Models that come to mind for bringing her to life: Arsinoé from Molière's brilliant *Misanthrope* (the ever-rebuffed prude with meager charms); or, more wackily, Kristen Wiig's short-armed character in the Lawrence Welk routines of *SNL*.

Where the First Pilgrimage repels, the magnetic Second Pilgrimage attracts. I've dubbed her "Juicy Lucy" because she is forward, seductive, flirtatious, and just plain loose. Physically, Lucy should be gorgeous. Both male pilgrims are quite taken with her. Gentlemen prefer blondes? A Marilyn Monroe look-alike would work well.

The Third Pilgrimage, from whom we don't hear much, seems a bit of a spinster-in-training who doesn't twig most of her own unintentional double entendres. Prim, proper, and possibly prudish, she shall be "Prudence" (although "Prissy" would also have suited her). Since she has relatively few lines, it is conceivable that this character could engage in a great deal of mime, some related to devotional practice (praying the rosary, genuflecting, etc.)

For better delineation of the female characters, I have sometimes exaggerated (only slightly) the language of the original, but not the content. Each Pilgrimage shall have her own mode of speaking and of singing. (As in #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, song choice is key.) I briefly toyed with the idea of translating their speech patterns into the canonical rhetorical styles of high, middle, and low: Biddy certainly puts on airs and often aims for high style, whereas Lucy is occasionally vulgar and low. But there was nothing sufficiently middling about Prudence to warrant such consistency.

As for the Old and Young Pilgrims, we have seen these types before both in #1, *The Newlywed Game* and in #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint*. In *Holy Deadlock*, the Old Pilgrim has a tendency to speak in proverbs; there is something about him that reminds one of Lewis Carroll's "You are old, Father William."⁸ Keenly aware of his own status as exemplar, the Old Pilgrim—in tatters, bent, and broken—is a walking, talking parody of his own character type. Like Doc Phil (#1) and Wayne (#6), he looks as though he has been through the wringer and, as far as love is concerned, he has. That said, whatever has caused his downtrodden appearance, it wasn't sex. Additionally, there are some fabulous allusions to his "writing," "copying," or "scribbling"; so he might be imagined as "bookish," a hunched-over scribe, a scrivener, a Dickensian clerk. Updated, he might even tote a journal in which he records

his impressions maniacally, anally. When he speaks, his lexicon and style depend very much on whom he is addressing. At times, he adopts an almost faux-aristocratic air whereas, *ex parte*, he has the mouth of a stevedore. When engaging with Lucy, he is at once downright flowery and downright filthy; when disengaging with poor Biddy, he is rude and vulgar. In some respects, that multifacetedness reflects a profound ambiguity in the play as to his true attitude toward marriage. Is it marriage that has so wearied him (as it did Doc Phil of our first play)? Or is it the quest for the right gal that has made him so sick and tired? Honestly, he sounds a bit like a later Woodsman—not from #5, *The Jackass Conjecture* but from Jean de la Fontaine’s seventeenth-century fable, “Death and the Woodsman” (“La Mort et le Bûcheron”). When Death answers the poor protagonist’s call for an end to his misery, the Woodsman ultimately elects to go on suffering.⁹ Thus, when the Old Pilgrim describes himself as a *pauvre pelerin douloureux / de mariage langoureux / dont je ne puis trouver la fin* (RGS, vv. 10–15), does he mean that he is a “poor pilgrim, suffering the pain of a marriage to which he finds no end”? Or does his pain derive from an, as yet, never-ending *pilgrimage* to find a wife? What exactly has wearied him so much? What “never ends”? The quest, or the marriage?

The Young Pilgrim, even though fatigued, is an impulsive hothead, blustering and bellowing till he’s blue in the . . . face, huffing and puffing till he blows . . . whomever. All smoke but not a lot of heat. Quick on the trigger, he suffers from many of the character flaws that farce normally ascribes to women. He might look effeminate, foppish, dandyish, or, if a queer subtext appeals, he might be coded as gay. He’s also a modern kind of fellow, whose rivalry with the Old Pilgrim is not limited to the play’s military terminology and technology. He might have an iPhone in hand at all times. He is probably a prolific sexter too.

Finally, in light of the centrality of the production numbers, as many extras as desirable could be cast to fit the theatrical bill.

Language

Even in the Middle French of *Holy Deadlock* there is something linguistically off, and not just off-color. Rousse pulled no punches. He found it all very peculiar, all a bit queer, noting that the copyist must have been careless or distracted because there are all manner of improprieties: aberrant spellings or verb conjugations (notably for that pesky imperfect subjunctive), inconsistent versification, weird rhymes and assonance. Rousse does leave

a little room for blaming the author rather than the copyist; but the bottom line is that, whoever was at fault, the writing relishes the linguistically unconventional (*TFFMA*, 2: 217–19). This all turns out to be a blessing in disguise. Inasmuch as the entire play is aggressively unconventional, its innumerable difficulties and idiosyncrasies enable—nay, encourage—some liberties in translation. And when I say “liberties,” I really do mean liberties. And appropriations. Having encountered few medieval texts—save maybe the fabliaux—that are quite as audacious as *Holy Deadlock*, I have taken its audacity as a cue to spotlight the production numbers in the most audacious possible ways. The Company may not agree as to whether their quest goes the route of holy wedlock or holy deadlock; but everyone is on the road to Mardi Gras. Hit the road, Jacques.®

Intriguing linguistic dimensions of the *Pèlerinage* include the vocabulary of such epics as the *Song of Roland* (as in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*); Greco-Roman mythology (the Trojan War, Hercules); and many a fabulous pun such as *débat/d'ébats* (“debate” as sound-alike for “sexual pleasure” [vv. 55–56]). More significantly, the play’s vocabulary communes with a complex, musical system of communication involving popular songs and the Christian liturgy. Picture a debate format like the *tenson* but, instead of the two interlocutors of #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint* or #1, *The Newlywed Game*, the clash of philosophies is now embodied by five characters, all tawking amongst themselves and with the audience. On many occasions, they do so in song. Of the panoply of popular ditties of the day, Rousse has identified fourteen medieval songs plus six more that, while clearly songs, are known from no other extant source (*TFFMA*, 2: 219–27). To borrow a term from musicology, I submit that what we have in the *Pèlerinage* is the farcical flip side of a series of *contrafacta*, that is, the migration of vernacular melodies into liturgical singing and, more decisively, the reverse migration of the liturgy into farce. And why not? Hymns, antiphony, and the like had long been part of the medieval rhetorical picture, from the earliest “music dramas” of the Church to such vernacular masterpieces as Adam de la Halle’s almost operatic, late thirteenth-century *Robin et Marion*.¹⁰ Besides, farce always gets it ass-backwards. It makes perfect sense to take the liturgy to the streets or, as we would say today, to kick it to the curb.

Let me state, however, in no uncertain terms that nothing compares to the escalating sacrilege of the liturgical parodies, mostly delivered in a bilingual mess of a Latin and French which, by analogy to Franglais, I have elsewhere called Flatin (*FF*, 374–75). These carnivalesque moments are designed for

participation by the spectators (*TFFMA*, 2: 230–31): participation as profanation.¹¹ Nothing is spared and nothing is sacred: not prayers (*Libera nos, domine* and *Te rogamus, audi nos*), not litanies, not responsories,¹² not processions, not even the words of Christ on the cross. I mean, seriously: *Domine* (“God, our Father”) rhymes with *uriner* (“to urinate”) (v. 404). Talk about Piss Christ. And at Easter, no less. Indeed, the poetic set pieces are so hyperbolic that one very quickly comes to understand both the play’s brushes with censorship and the challenges to translation. On one hand, a liturgical prayer in Latin will be about as recognizable to contemporary Anglophone audiences as a pun in Sanskrit. If recognition of the object of imitation grounds the very definition of satire (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b), then, for *Holy Deadlock* to succeed, the medieval liturgy *cannot* be unrecognizable. On the other hand, its churchiness *cannot* be unfunny. This is farce: unfunny is not an option.

What to do, what to do? All I can say is: thank heavens for the Lord’s Prayer, which most Americans have at least heard. And thank heavens for something like Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, which captures better than most anything the play’s sheer gutsiness as it mocks the hell out of the Church.

Overall, such quandaries about unfunniness were further compounded by the prodigious lists that bring the play to a close. A first list serves up food-stuffs and housewares, including those peas and beans of #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*. (Has this old man been reading *The Distaff Gospels* too?) A second list is devoted to imaginary female saints (Saint Rageaholic, Saint Cacklie, Saint Thundercloud, etc.).¹³ And a third one catalogs threads. That’s right: *threads*, as in embroidery, stitchery, needlework (see note 14). It’s a lengthy, madcap inventory of the sewing notions that might have been for sale at any marketplace in Lyon or Rouen. It’s the best-stocked sewing basket on the planet. It’s the greatest textile show on Earth. In the span of twenty-six verses, no fewer than twenty-eight varieties of thread are mentioned, of every imaginable color, size, and commercial provenance. Clearly, this was meant to be a tour de force, razzle-dazzle send-off; so any rendering into English must pack all the punch of the fireworks on the Fourth of July. But with thread? In a play consecrated to the proper path to follow, all that thread sure seems like a non sequitur. Really? *Non sequitur*? After all that trouble, it doesn’t follow?

We must be missing something. What is it?

For Petit de Julleville, the “fastidious enumeration” of filaments was merely a tongue twister of sorts “for the talented actor reciting it,” an opportunity to display a virtuoso memory “in an otherwise boring literary genre” (*RTC*, 211). Right he was about the virtuoso display; but there was nothing

boring about it. For myself, I've always believed that medieval and Renaissance lists were all about performance enlivened by mime. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the *torche-culs* of Rabelais's own infamous pileup of the scores of implements that a young Gargantua literally shoves up his ass to clean it (*Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 34–37). In addition to telling the Church to “shove it up its ass,” as it were, I contend that many of these seemingly strange enumerations—from dead knights on the battlefield in the *Song of Roland* to the threads of *Holy Deadlock*—actually functioned as call-outs for sing-alongs, mime, exaggeration, histrionics, and the enactment of oral, aural, and visual slapstick. Take some of the bona fide production numbers (such as the extensive sequence reproduced in note 35): the versification is so thick, so densely interwoven with refrains from actual songs that, especially given the participatory nature of other aspects of the play, it is more than reasonable to posit that the audience is being invited to join the Company in song, positively reveling in all the musical intertextuality. (Picture the scene from the 1984 film *Amadeus* in which the “vulgar” theater for the common folk includes funny horses and sing-alongs.) For one thing, if you hear (in your mind's ear) a rapid-fire performance of the thread speech, then *fil* starts to sound like *fi!* (“God damn,” as above in #2, *The Shithouse*, § “Language”). Come on, the whole point of a tongue twister is to lead to sillily sibilant slips shaped by serendipitously shifting syllables into strange sacrilegious sense. If the grand finale of *Holy Deadlock* tips its hat to the textile industry and to the medieval French commercial *foires*—so said Madeleine Jeay—I suggest that it does so for the farce industry too.¹⁴ It's more than a list: it's a goddamn bridal registry. The question is what this crazy patchwork of a liturgical quilt is sewing together.

In a familiar farcical *modus operandi*, everything is both exactly what it literally seems and something else, all about the social fabric of marriage. So too for all those threads. They must be instantly recognizable as both material objects and mystical symbols. They are literal and metaphorical, readily accessible and highly inaccessible. The better to fashion their foundation, I've embroidered this translation with multiple idioms related to sewing and notions, which are frequent in the French language. (Consider the “thimble-brain” made famous by Georges Brassens in *Une Jolie Fleur*, our “pea-brain.”)¹⁵ The thing about “threads,” though: the word works well in English too, particularly for anyone who grew up in the 1960s. They're *clothes*. My own hunch is that this is some sort of grand in-joke. What if, say, there had been some kind of Rabelaisian Picrocholine War between Car-

pentier's theater company and the seamsters hired for their previous season? What if their costumes had been so poorly sewn that the vestimentary items had come apart? And, if the Basochial docket was full, and since there was no *Judge Judy* in the Middle Ages, what if the actors were taking to the stage to air their dispute?

Whatever it is, *Holy Deadlock* is bursting at the seams.

How convenient. So, in a translation that is as literal as it is liberal, I've morphed the lineup of obscure and common threads into obscure and common articles of clothing. I then stitched the fabric of the play together with the irreverent threads that run throughout. The "threads" in question shall be the assorted garments worn by the medieval Catholic clergy. From the white alb to the priestly collar to the cassock, there was no dearth of specialized wardrobe items.¹⁶ I don't wish to spoil the surprise; so, for now, I'll reveal only that I've presented two versions, doubling the final poetic set piece in a material climax.

Sets and Staging

How to envisage the physical space of this play? It might be as stripped down, barren, and desolate as any set of *Waiting for Godot*. It might look a Chaucerian period piece. It might look like the main stage at Vegas. Or, for an audience of French majors, it might play out before a backdrop bedecked by a latter-day *Carte du Tendre* (above, § "Plot"). In fact, there is a fascinating allusion in one of the original stage directions indicating that the Company shall turn to face the room or the great hall: *Tous ensemble en tournant a la salle* (see note 48). This reference to performance in an interior space is solid gold for theater historians. Whether the space takes shape as grandiose, ecclesiastical, aristocratic, civic, or something else, it is useful to allow for three sets onstage simultaneously (a triumvirate not uncommon in the history of the medieval French theater). Any production could include the "Land of Marriage," the open road, and the marketplace, that third commercial site key to contextualizing all the bizarre threads.

All manner of musical styles are suitable for, as they call them on *The Bachelor*, the "ladies" of *Holy Deadlock*. They are essentially a girl group; so their "stylings" will depend very much on dramaturgical sensibilities. I've opted for the delightful anachronism of Motown: à la Diana Ross with her backup Supremes, they are Biddy and Pilgrimettes. But other bands would work just as well: the Shangri-Las from the mid-1960s—Remember "The Leader of

the Pack”?[®]—or the Bangles from the 1980s, and so on. And, because the Company and the audience will be doing a good deal of singing along, also relevant would be a reincarnation of the 1960s’ *Sing Along with Mitch*. So too would a remix of all those Looney Tunes that culminated in a sing-along by viewers urged to “follow the bouncing ball” over onscreen lyrics. What is farce, after all, if not a cartoon—and, in this case, an insistently participatory cartoon? Never more so in our play than during the processional, where the audience is a party to the proceedings. Make that a “partyer” to the proceedings. In production, spectators must be brought to their feet, up and moving, joining in. If necessary, fellow actors might be seated strategically as plants among the spectators to help get things going. The *Rocky Horror Picture Show* had nothing on medieval French farce.

Costumes and Props

The Old Pilgrim is garbed in threadbare rags; he should carry a day planner of some kind and some writing implements; the Young Pilgrim sports an elegant cape along with an iPhone or a Blackberry. Biddy has donned something tight-fitting and age-inappropriate; Lucy will wear a getup as whorish as possible (check out Anna Nicole in #10, *Husband Swap*); and Prudence, with scroll or codex in hand, camouflages her body with something high-collared and prissy. The Young Pilgrim has conceived his effeminate look with the greatest attention to detail. Both male Pilgrims hold large staffs, facilitating several puns about their “rods.” Biddy and the Pilgrimettes will need triangles, bells, and whistles for the big procession.

For the priestly threads of the closing set piece, everything needed is itemized in the text (see note 54).

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by [®] within the text)

“Amazing Journey.” By Peter Townshend. BMI Work #33852.

“Long and Winding Road.” By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. BMI Work #896236.

“La Carte du Tendre.” By Georges Moustaki.¹⁷

“Hit the Road, Jack.” By Percy Mayfield. BMI Work #571691.

“Leader of the Pack.” By Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, and George Morton. BMI Work #843252.

“I Will Follow Him.” [“Chariot.”] By Paul Julien, André Mauriat, Jacques Plante, and Franck Marius Louis Pourcel. ASCAP Work ID: 330425866.
 “Only the Good Die Young.” By Bill Joel. ASCAP Work ID: 450115269.
 “Summer Nights.” By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP Work ID: 490299095.
 “Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross.” Traditional.
 “Mustang Sally.” By Bonny Rice. BMI Work #1026286.
 “Ride Like the Wind.” By Christopher Cross. ASCAP Work ID: 480144485.
 “Walk This Way.” By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.
 “I’m Gonna Live till I Die.” By Al Hoffman, Walter Kent, and Manny Kurtz. ASCAP Work ID: 390050514.
 “Sweet Nothin’s.” By Ronnie Self. BMI Work #1440054.
 “Everything’s Coming Up Roses.” By Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne. ASCAP Work ID: 350034303.
 “So Long, Farewell.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 490089142.
 “Wilkommen.” By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #1674736.
 “Love Is a Battlefield.” By Mike Chapman, Randall Hargove, and Holly Knight. ASCAP Work ID: 882360621.
 “This Old Man.” Traditional counting song / nursery rhyme.
 “Someone’s Watching over Me” [“Raise Your Voice”]. By Kara DioGuardi and John Shanks. ASCAP Work ID: 492236836.
 “In the Midnight Hour.” By Stephen Lee Cropper and Wilson Pickett Jr. BMI Work #720739.
 “Price Tag.” By Jessica Cornish, Lukasz Gottwald, and Claude Kelly. ASCAP Work ID: 82430468.
 “Glamorous.” By William Adams, Christopher Bridges [Ludacris], Stacy Ferguson [Fergie], Jamal Jones, Micaiah Raheem, and Elvis Williams. BMI Work # 8561329.
 “Afternoon Delight.” By William Danoff. ASCAP Work ID: 310147203.
 “Don’t Rain on My Parade.” By William Crystal, Allan Sachs, Marc Shaiman, David Steinberg, Jule Styne, Burch Valanch, and Robert Wuhl. BMI Work #2337047.
 “Run for the Roses.” By Daniel Fogelberg. ASCAP Work ID: 480149122.
 “Those Were the Days.” By Eugene Raskin. ASCAP Work ID: 500195793.

“Non, je ne regrette rien.” By Charles Dumont and Michel Vaucaire.
 ASCAP Work ID: 440048833.

“La Vie en rose.” By Mack David, Edith Gassion [Edith Piaf], and Luis
 Guiglielmi. ASCAP Work ID: 520012862.

“Dat’s Love.” [“Habanera” from *Carmen Jones*, as adapted from Georges
 Bizet’s *Carmen*.] By Roger Russell Bennett, Georges Bizet, Ludovic
 Halevy, and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 40005430.

“The Harder They Come [the Harder They Fall].” By Jimmy Cliff. BMI
 Work #115830.

“Love Is a Rose.” By Neil Young. ASCAP Work ID: 420193348.

“Here Comes the Rain Again.” By Annie Lennox and David Stewart.
 ASCAP Work ID: 380256348.

“Come & Get It.” By Esther Dean, Mikkel Eriksen, and Tor Hermansen.
 ASCAP Work ID: 885158038.

“Edelweiss.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP
 Work ID: 350007977.

“Hear My Song.” By Jason Robert Brown. ASCAP Work ID: 380699665.

“Where You Lead.” By Carole King and Toni Stern. ASCAP ID:
 530170824.

“Wait for Me.” By Anthony, Ivan, Jared, and Matthew Followil [Kings of
 Leon]. BMI Work #16429253.

“Look at Me, I’m Sandra Dee.” By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP
 Work ID: 420168607.

“Be Still My Beating Heart.” By Sting. BMI Work #93445.

“Sweet Gypsy Rose.” By Irwin Levine and Russell Brown. BMI Work
 #1294630.

“Chains.” By Gerald Goffin and Carole King. BMI Work #195934.

“Strike Up the Band.” By George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP
 Work ID: 490151654.

“Treat Her Right.” By Roy Head and Gene Kurtz. BMI Work #1542510.

“At the Hop.” By John Medora, Arthur Singer, and David White. BMI
 Work #62670.

“Get Off [of] My Cloud.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work
 #463889.

“In the Mood.” By Joseph Garland and Andy Razaf. ASCAP Work
 ID: 390128940.

“Une Jolie Fleur [dans une Peau de Vache].” By Georges Brassens. ASCAP
 Work ID: 510535754.

“The Vatican Rag.” By Tom Lehrer. ASCAP Work ID: 520035829.

“Love and Marriage.” By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen. ASCAP
Work ID: 420081361.

[Possible opening music]¹⁸

[Scene 1]

[On the outskirts of town]

BIDDY, The OLD PILGRIMESS *begins*

So shall we be off on our journey? They call it marriage and it's all you young ladies can think about.

JUICY LUCY, The Second PILGRIMESS

Can't hardly wait. I'm outta here! Let's go!

PRUDENCE, The Third PILGRIMESS

Since marriage is pleasing to God, I'm willing to join you, of course: as long as we keep to the straight and narrow. [*She makes the sign of the cross and reads from a large scroll in her hand.*] “Praise the Lord and hal-
lowed be His name!”

[What? So I missed a rehearsal or two.]¹⁹

[*Enter the Old Pilgrim, looking exhausted and disheveled from whatever he has been through. He might be talking to himself as one who has gone mad; or he might address the audience directly. Noticing the three women, he speaks loudly and histrionically enough for them to hear.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

I seek. . . I seek. . . Whenever shall I find? Oh, marriage! Oh, the long and winding road!²⁰

Whatever is a poor, weary pilgrim to do? There's just no end to it.

[*To the audience*] If there's a man out there who hasn't worn himself out going down that road, let the gentleman speak now or forever hold his pea—

LUCY

Party on, girls! Look! There's a pilgrim headed this way!

BIDDY

[*Almost in reverie*] Just look at him . . . reminds me of a man who's all . . . tapped out. Spent. Wherever he's been, he's been through something. Through the wringer: just look at those threads.
Good evening, friend.

[*At first, there is no reply. Much of the comedy will derive from the Old Pilgrim's avoidance of Biddy. He is more interested in sizing up the young women, especially Lucy, to whom he turns lecherously.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

Et vobis, Madame.

LUCY

[*To the audience*] That's Latin.

The OLD PILGRIM

Duh. I'm all the rage.

[*Biddy draws near with her best effort at seduction.*]

BIDDY

Oh my! As we can see. Which pilgrimage did you say you were coming from?
Hello?

The OLD PILGRIM

Where did I come from? I can't say. But I bet that I've come a long, long way.²⁰

[BIDDY

Amen to that, my brother! Me too. Been at it for ages.]

LUCY

Come on, tell us more, tell us more.© [Did you get very far?©]

The OLD PILGRIM

[Tell you more, tell you more? Babe, just follow my star.©]

They call it “marriage,” the “journey” I been on. [And I’m in it for the right reasons.]

BIDDY

Why, we were just headed that way ourselves.

[The OLD PILGRIM]

Godspeed, lady!

[Lucy might touch the Old Pilgrim’s staff and he, the fabric of her clothes. Biddy is increasingly annoyed that he is ignoring her.]

LUCY

If you could just point us in the right direction. Pretty please.

BIDDY

[Glaring at the rapt Old Pilgrim] Surely there’s no need for a vow of silence.

The OLD PILGRIM

[Rudely, to Biddy] Not like that’s an option for [some] women.

LUCY

And how’s about for menfolk?

The OLD PILGRIM

[To Lucy alone] Silence can be golden for them too. I didn’t want to agree to it first, especially since you’re allowed some little white lies—fabrications—along the way. But there *are* advantages to holding your tongue.

BIDDY

In marriage? [*There is no response.*] Surely, the language of love doesn't countenance rudeness. [*Nearing him*] There is a marital language, *n'est-ce pas? Parlez-vous?*

The OLD PILGRIM

[*Continuing to ignore her and speaking to Lucy*] Pretty little thing like you'd pick it up in no time. At least, so I've heard.

LUCY

So, once I'm in, what would I say?

The OLD PILGRIM

"Yes." Yes, yes, and yes. That's the only word you'll ever need to know. [*He might offer her a piggyback ride.*]²¹ [Care to hop on?]

BIDDY

I'm sure that what *Monsieur* means is that one can get there on horseback, yes? Ride a cock horse?[©]

The OLD PILGRIM

[*Still targeting Lucy*] Ride, Sally, ride![©] Some menfolk wanna mount that filly and head off at a full gallop. Ride like the wind.[©] But sometimes, slow but steady wins the race. Don't wanna finish too early, if you catch my drift. Gotta sit back and enjoy the ride. It's a holy pilgrimage for Chrissakes. Everybody's doin' it.

LUCY

Amen, brother, and hallelujah! Let's do it!

The OLD PILGRIM

Praise the Lord! Away we go!

BIDDY

Is it a lovely dwelling place?

The OLD PILGRIM

[*To Biddy*] It's a goddamn vale o' tears, lady, nonstop combat.

[*To Lucy*] Hand to hand, for you, babe.²² [And hand to hand is holy palmers' kiss.] You just need to be up for a little challenge.

LUCY

Once more into the fray! Just try to hold me back!

The OLD PILGRIM

With pleasure. Come on, walk this way.[©]

Gonna live, live, live till I die.[©]

[*To Biddy*] See you around, lady.

BIDDY

[*Grabbing his arm*] If you could you just tell us: on this journey, might we meet anybody who might lead us astray?

[*He tries several times to push Biddy out of the way but she will have none of it.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

What do you think? If you can't see the forest for the trees.

[*Aside*] Or follow a rational argument.²³

[*He spins Biddy around and tries unsuccessfully to push her offstage.*] Just keep your wits about you! Stick to the straight and narrow. Steady as you go! It's the only way, lady, and it's that-a-way! There you go: the beaten path to holy wedlock for you . . . way down there! Don't you stray now, or you'll be sorry. No bushwhackin' for you!

LUCY

The Good Lord protect us! No path o' perdition for *moi*!

BIDDY

And what can you tell us about the currency of love? Are there special attentions? Favors? What's the going rate out there? The rate of exchange?

The OLD PILGRIM

You get what you pay for, lady. [Now, do *me* a favor and—]

LUCY

What was that about the going rate?

The OLD PILGRIM

[*To Lucy*] For some, it's always Ladies' Night. Sweet nothin's.[®]

[*To Biddy*] For others, nothin' doin'. Tit for tat. Gimme this, gimme that, gimme this, gimme shit. Always runnin' their mouths about some-thin'! And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

LUCY

Nothin' too sweet about them nothin's. What? No dozen roses?

The OLD PILGRIM

Pretty little thing like you? Everything's comin' up roses!^{®24}

[*Biddy continues to try to get his attention.*]

Jesus Christ! If it's not one thing, it's your mother!

BIDDY

Is that the truth?

[*The Old Pilgrim is still fixated on Lucy and might even offer cash for her services.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

Roses, I tell you. Everything's comin' up. Besides, our Heavenly Father has decreed that, when a Pilgrim seeks the state of holy wedlock, well, he's gotta buy in. Those are the rules.²⁵ Pay to play. Gotta indulge.

LUCY

You sellin' indulgences now, big boy? How much?

The OLD PILGRIM

[*Aside*] I don't know about you fools, but I'm sure ready to indulge.

[Hey, folks! Remember when Jesus told the one about the wise and foolish virgins? Oh, forget it. Kids these days.]

How much? Depends who's askin'. A buck or two usually does the trick. [*He might attempt to place the bill in Lucy's bosom.*]²⁶

BIDDY

That's it?

The OLD PILGRIM

Not a penny more. I can assure you that's the going rate.

LUCY

Wow. Sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

The OLD PILGRIM

Again, depends on the man. For some, it's a real bargain; for others, not so much. Depends on the gal too, and what can I say? A woman like you can pretty much set her own rates. But pity the fool who rushes in where angels fear to tread! For some, it's heaven; for others, [*indicating Biddy*], it's more like hell on earth! But, once you're in, you're in. [No escape. And you can't be shoutin' "fire" in no crowded theater!]²⁷

[Scene 2]

[*Enter the Young Pilgrim. He too is quite tired but puts on a braver face. During the scene, he might pause to do some texting.*]

The YOUNG PILGRIM

[*Bonjour, tout le monde!*]

Hello! *Bonjour!* and *Guten Tag!* Good Day!^{©28}

BIDDY

And you.

The OLD PILGRIM

And you.

LUCY

And you.

PRUDENCE

And you.

[The COMPANY]

[*To the audience*] [And you!®]

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Where you folks headed?

BIDDY

You first. Where you headed there, Pilgrim? Goin' my way?

The YOUNG PILGRIM

[*He too tries to put Biddy off.*] If you must know, ma'am, I've been on pilgrimage. Headed straight down the path to holy wedlock.

[*Indicating Biddy to the audience*] You can see why this would be a source of anxiety.

LUCY

We're headed that way ourselves. And we were just asking for directions, and asking that Pilgrim over there if he can tell us what it's like. He's just been. But I can tell he's real sorry he ever went down that road.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

That old guy? With his nose in the books all the time? [*He grabs the Old Pilgrim's day planner.*] Might as well be a damn scrivener²⁹—as if anybody could even read that chicken scratch! Dude's practically senile. I'd be real surprised if he could keep his end up, you know?

[Yo! Bartleby!] Get lost, Pops! Get thee to church and say your prayers. We'll get by just fine.

The OLD PILGRIM

You got your nerve. Ready, aim. . . . You think you're on the cutting edge. My pen is mightier than your sword! Good God almighty, son! We'll soon see who can't keep his end up. I give you three years tops.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Can you believe these old guys? Look at him! All bent and broken. Comin' apart at the seams. Hell, his brains are practically fallin' out on the green grass! [{*To the audience*}: Epic poetry, guys, hello! Read any?]

Just try and come after me, you old fart! I got me a nice big rod to defend myself: strong, sturdy, erect, and all set to thrust away. En garde! I'll take on all comers!

The OLD PILGRIM

I get it. Stepped right outta the *Song of Roland*, did you? What a brave little boy he is! But, Mary, Mother of God, just wait'll you see what a wimp he is the minute the equipment gives out.

[*To Biddy*] Hell, mine gave out years ago. Bent and broken, I tell you. Food for worms.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Gross.

[*To Lucy*] Just because these old farts can't deal, is that any reason to discourage us young folks? Down you go, old man! [*He takes a swing at the Old Pilgrim, who dodges the blow.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

Easy, there, Hercules. Maybe try again tomorrow.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Just wait'll I get my hands on you, I'll kick your ass! My equipment's killer. And I'm a lady-killer too.³⁰

The OLD PILGRIM

Friend Oliver, sound that horn! Love is a battlefield![®] Easy does it there, caped crusader! You slay me, kid. [Talk about carnivalesque!] Next stop, Rabelais!³¹

PRUDENCE

Good heavens! This is not exactly reassuring.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Seriously? Can you believe this guy? Gonna fight today's battle with yesterday's technology?

This old man,³² he played one, he played knick-knack on his thumb.

With a knick-knack, paddywhack, give the dog a boner . . .[®]

Hold me back, girls, before I'm all over 'im like—

[Biddy is only too happy to try to separate the two men. The Young Pilgrim pauses in disgust at the Old Pilgrim's hideous clothes.]

The OLD PILGRIM

A cheap suit?

[To the Young Pilgrim, Biddy, or both] So back off, bitch! Who do you think you are now? Asterix?³³ No? Hector? Mind that crossbow, fella, and take it easy with them slings and arrows.³⁴ This ain't no Trojan War! But by all means, stay the course. Go on, shoot your wad in one blow! He'll be dead meat in no time!

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Lemme give it to you straight: marriage is bitchin'! And if it woulda displeased God, then he never woulda started it up in the first place. He made it a damn sacrament, for God's sake! From heaven on high and shit. And that's why you don't dis the state o' holy wedlock. That's what I say!

The OLD PILGRIM

Oh really? So if God was so hot on the idea of marriage—which I've never believed for one minute, by the way—then how come He never got hitched Himself? You mark my words: God was no doofus.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Shut up, dude, before He strikes you dead and—for God's sake—quit shootin' your mouth off. *[Making the sign of the cross]* May the Lord . . .

The OLD PILGRIM

Damn you to hell! 'Cause that's just where you'll be with a wife, [you big pussy]!

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Better watch your mouth, dude! That's defamation! [Quit talkin' shit before you pop a vein! I'll thank you to refrain from your refrain.]

*[With the previous verse, here begins the first production number and its multiple snippets from medieval songs. This number might be choreographed as tap dance.]*³⁵

BIDDY

The heart in love has everything to gain.
When it can choose, then marriage is the choice.
I don't believe there's suffering or pain:
They [all] sing [this refrain]
It's paradise on earth. Now raise your voice!®

[*The Old Pilgrim approaches Lucy lecherously.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

It's paradise plus time 'cause, to rejoice.
In marriage—want it sweet as milk and honey?³⁶—
Be sure you make a better kind of a choice:
They sing
In bed! Just wait until the midnight hour.®

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Money's no object for your only one. She
Makes you feel the ecstasy, the power
In bed. I mean it. I'm not bein' funny:
They sing
And she don't need the money, money, money!®

The OLD PILGRIM

You best get used to taking a cold shower!
A bitter icy wind does start to blow.
It's frostiness, complaints, and womanpower:
They sing
The livelong night: my daddy told me so!®

PRUDENCE

His staff in hand, the man shouts "Charge! Let's go!"³⁷
I find no fault with what goes on at night.
The pleasures to be found . . . you'll never know:
They sing
It's ecstasy! It's afternoon delight!®

The OLD PILGRIM

It's ecstasy? It's pleasure? It's delight?
Life gives you lemons, you get lemonade.
I don't believe a word so, nurse, good night!
They sing
I'm not a fool. Don't rain on my parade!®

BIDDY

You *are* a fool. You're ripe for Medicaid.
Your meaning is obscure: what's that you say?
Dumb is forever. Only beauty fades:
They sing
Run for the roses!® Gather while ye may!

The OLD PILGRIM

I'll see your rosebuds: raise you one cliché:
In love, it's fight or flight. Everyone knows
It takes you down. Oh yes, those were the days!®
They sing
Je ne regrette rien!® *La vie en rose.*®

PRUDENCE

La vie en rose? With thorns under your nose?
Wear gloves against the pricks that never quit.
Love fits you like a glove? Don't come to blows!
They sing
Dat's love!® If it won't fit, you must acquit!

The OLD PILGRIM

You must acquit? Aren't you the soul of wit!
We old dogs know a few new tricks is all.
Young studs just get their panties in a snit:
They sing
Watch out! Harder they come, harder they fall.®

LUCY

Harder they fall? Let's just say booty call.
I say love is a rose: grows on the vine.®

A thorny rose runs wild and grows real tall:
They sing
You'll lose your love if you say the word "mine."[©]

The OLD PILGRIM

The word "mine" and the rose? Not by design.
Don't you recall that, on his blessed head
A crown of thorns wore Jesus. 'Twas a sign:
They sing
Sic transit gloria mundi. You're dead!

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Touché! Except a hard man who's well bred
Is good to find. He'll always see it through.
A stud won't bow his head when he's in bed:
They sing
His duty is to do like lovers do.[©]

The OLD PILGRIM

It all looks good from far away, that's true.
But inside marriage, music's all off-key.
You give and give, but she won't give to you:
They sing
So sing it: Love will be the death of me![©]

BIDDY

Love giveth; Love taketh away. You see?
And yet, my heart breaks into happy song.
The laws of nature say it e'er shall be:
They sing
For Love makes all things blossom and grow[©] strong.

The OLD PILGRIM

Grow strong? Until you die? Lady, you're wrong!
Love's just a vale of tears. You don't belong.
Maybe I can escape before too long:
They sing
But that will never happen: hear my song![©]

The YOUNG PILGRIM [*With obscene gestures*]

Never, you say? No way! Dude, move along!

It's fun, it's laughs, it's charming tête-à-têtes.

I'm gonna keep on singin'. I'm headstrong:

They sing

Because my woman's too good to forget!

The OLD PILGRIM

Too good? You think that Love is a duet?

Just run, boy! She won't follow where you lead.®

Poor kid don't know he's whipped. Don't hold your breath:

They sing

Waiting to hear: "My darling, wait for me!"®

LUCY

Hey baby, look at me! I'm Sandra Dee!

I'm lousy with vir- . . . ® Marriage is the best.

It's all orgasmic, yes! It's bliss. [*She makes the hand sign for "L"*] It's
Glee:³⁸

They sing

[*With a suggestive gesture*] Be still, my beating heart,® right here within
my chest!

The OLD PILGRIM

You speak of bliss? Of bliss? You speak of love undressed?

Oh, Lord, what is Thy will? Hast Thou forsaken me?³⁹

I've lost my wealth, my name, my treasures, and the rest.

My wasted heart is done. Alas! fait accompli!

I'm begging you: enough! Good Lord, please: let me be!

No more from you to him or her to me⁴⁰

'Cause no one keeps a promise once they're wed.

To marry means you're not right in the head.

You'll be on someone's leash: you're never free.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

It's marriage! Can't live with it, can't be dead.

You think you'll do without? You've been misled.

Without it, there's no joy, no friends, no kin.
You can't refute my premise, sir: I win.
You disagree? Then you're a knucklehead.

The OLD PILGRIM

Fools might rush in where angels fear to tread:
The players, party boys, the great unwed.
Some go in backwards: don't account for taste,
But don't tempt Fate. Beware, lest haste make waste:
Don't break your whip, screaming, "Full speed ahead!"

BIDDY

Listen to me, you all. It's my turn now:
If you renege, then what good is a vow?
Plus why on earth would menfolk ever make it
[If only to regret it and to break it?]⁴¹
You'll catch more flies with honey, boys, and how!

The OLD PILGRIM

If men push more than good sense would allow—
One's got it all; one's holier than thou;
One Jack is nimble, one Jack ain't too quick
And, then, there's Jack who hocks his candlestick—
There's never enough money anyhow.

The PILGRIMETTES *in unison*

[Well-a, well-a, well-a, uh!]
Let 'em talk. We don't care. Can we get very far?®

The OLD PILGRIM

Let 'em talk? You don't care? Go on, girls, there you are.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

That's enough! That's enough! We'll have no more from you!

The OLD PILGRIM

Wanna go? Wanna go? That's what you wanna do?
So? Go on, go! Don't go! See if I care. Knock yourselves out! Jump
right in. No baby steps! Half a league, half a league, half a league on-
ward! Charge! Get the hell outta here!
No? So retreat! Run away, run away! But if you want to snag that pot
o' milk at the end o' the rainbow, you better bring it yourself.⁴² [What?
Metaphors too mixed for you folks? How's about: don't count your
chickens before they hatch!]

LUCY

What the fuck do chickens have to do with anything?
[*To the audience*] Old guy's got the wrong farce!
Unless it's that you're chickenshit. Come on, guys, off we go! It's pil-
grimage time!

The OLD PILGRIM

Be my guest, little lady. But if you're planning to stop by the altar first
to take some vows, take care! Better watch your Mass.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

And I'll be takin' vows with the rest of 'em.

The OLD PILGRIM

Go ahead! Walk right into the trap. Take the bait like all the other poor
schmucks and cuckolds. It's your funeral.

BIDDY

Tell me about it, stud.
Besides, it's a wedding, not a funeral. Surely you're not suggesting that a
person can't stay loyal and true in the state of holy wedlock.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

No problem! Forever and ever, till death do us part. I meant what I said
and I said what I meant. True lovers are faithful one hundred percent.

The OLD PILGRIM

[*To the Pilgrimettes*] Who? Him? He'd never have the balls to break his marriage vows! No worries there.⁴³ [*Possibly indicating the audience*] But that doesn't mean somebody else won't try to squeeze a little joy juice outta him, bend his will. . . . Need I say more?

PRUDENCE

Certainly not. Talk about your bad taste! Nothing should come between a man and his wife. And he better not be trying to change her: not for better, not for worse.

The OLD PILGRIM

Change her? Heaven forefend! If you could only change women like you change horses! Jesus Christ! The paperwork alone would bury you! [Come on, folks, read *The Newlywed Game*, wouldya?] Contracts, annulments, divorces. You can't imagine the red tape! Only the bartenders would come out ahead.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

Get the fuck outta here, dude, and quit shootin' your mouth off. You're really startin' to get on my nerves. You hear me?

[*In light of the lists to come, this would be a good moment to have the Company move about the marketplace, traversing a variety of booths and stands, all stocked with plenty of wares: clothes, housewares, and, above all, textiles.*]

The OLD PILGRIM

I can just see it now: our knight in shining armor all married off. He'll soon be singing a different tune.

By the way, don't forget the wardrobe: the suits and ties, the coats and jackets, [the Coats and Clarks,] the top hat and tails. . . . And plenty o' bling! Silver and gold, precious stones, rings on your fingers, bells on your toes.[©] And the chains! Your baby's got you locked up in chains. But they ain't the kind that you can see.[©]

BIDDY

Talk about your old dogs. Get lost! Scram! Vamoose, you old fart!⁴⁴
Now get [your bony ass] out of our sight!

The OLD PILGRIM

And just wait till it's time to eat! There's the bread and the wine, the fish and the fowl, the beans and the peas, the bacon and the ham. It's a helluva feast! And you better set a proper table too. There's the linen and the silver and the dinner service; there's the candles and the lanterns and the torches. You understand what I'm saying to you? [Are you even *registered*?]

The COMPANY

Get lost! Scram! Vamoose! It's paradise!

The OLD PILGRIM

Sure, maybe if God Himself were hangin' out in paradise with a couple o' hot angels.

The YOUNG PILGRIM

[Angels? Hmmmm. . . I'm thinkin' Victoria's Secret.] No mortal eye hath seen, no mortal ear hath. . . [To the Old Pilgrim] Oh, shut up!

The OLD PILGRIM

I'm just gettin' started! Hello? The *bridal* registry. You'll need the china and the place settings, and all that cookware: big pots, little pots, big pans, little pans, the casseroles, and the chafing dishes. The jugs, the pitchers, the creamers, and the candlesticks. The bowls, the plates, the cups, the glasses, the goblets, the carafes. The silverware, the cutlery, the slicers, and the dicers. The tea service, the doilies, the trays, the salt and pepper shakers. A man's gotta eat, right? Strap on that feedbag!⁴⁵ [With some dance moves] One-two-chow-chow-chow!

The YOUNG PILGRIM

It's not such a heavy load if the right man's on the job, so quit bustin' my chops. I got no problem hangin' in. Forever and ever. Count on it. Because . . .

ALL TOGETHER

[We] live in sure and certain hope.⁴⁶

The OLD PILGRIM

Been there, done that, swore that, but—

The Entire COMPANY

No ifs, ands, or—

The OLD PILGRIM

Buts nothin'!

LUCY

Nothin'? [That's exactly what we want to hear from you.] Pilgrimage is killer. [What? You never read no fuckin' Chaucer?] All the kids are doin' it. So, ready or not, marriage: here we come! We're goin' on pilgrimage now, and that's final!

The OLD PILGRIM

And you won't hear another word about it from me. I have only your best interests at heart. I'm just trying to give you fair warning so you can see if you're up for that kind of conversion because. . . . Oh, the obstacles along the way! The impediments to the understanding! That's why all of you better place yourselves in God's hands. Come to think of it, before you set out on that pilgrimage to holy wedlock, you better get down on your knees right now and beg God's mercy. Pray loudly and often and, if you really want to start off on the right foot, how's about we have us a little procession, shall we? That's right: with all the bells and whistles. And then, we'll do a number or two. You know the ones. Are you ready to strike up the band?[®]

[As there is likely no movement from the audience, the Company might sing a little bit of "traveling music" to encourage the beginning of the parade.]⁴⁷

[Okay, let me say that again:]

[Doubled verse version begins here.]

About all of those things that I just mentioned:
Don't take offense: it's all with good intentions.

I promise: I was casting no aspersions,
But marriage is one helluva conversion.
The obstacles you'll meet along the way
Wreak havoc on your poor mind every day.
And that's why you must say: "In God We Trust."
You can't be rushing, all "Marriage or Bust!"
Down on your knees! You better say a prayer.
And now get up! Let's all be on our way
Get up folks, now! It's time for the parade!
It's time for the procession. Sound those horns
'Cause, afterward, we're gonna do some songs.]

[Doubled version ends here.]

The YOUNG PILGRIM

That's our cue. It's time. Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for. . . .
But let the procession begin! And hey! all you folks out there: Did you
give it up for marriage? Well listen up and listen well 'cause I'm gonna
tell you a story every man oughta know:® Many are called but few are
chosen for the state of holy wedlock. It's good and good for you. And
once you're in, you've got it all.

*[Neither the Company nor the audience makes a move to begin the
procession.]*

[Doubled verse version begins here.]

The OLD PILGRIM

That's marriage! On your knees, folks! Let us pray!
His holy road has got a lot of stations:
Hop to it, kids, and get into formation!
It's time for the parade. Ding-dong, ding-dong!
What's that you say? You need a little song?
They all sing a song together.

*[The Company might morph in mime into a bona fide wedding
processional or do some line dancing.]*

[Doubled verse version ends here.]

[*The Company then rings a series of bells. Once again, there is great hesitation. Slowly, those on their knees might rise; and a plant or two in the audience might join them, participating—loudly and often—in the prayers to come.*]

The procession begins.

The OLD PILGRIM

So let's be off. Let's do the hop!®
We'll party on until we drop.
We'll sing our hearts out till we flop
And then it'll be time to stop.
[Folks, this is farce. We won't be dainty:
Let's hear it for the lady Sainties!
Some travelin' music, Maestro, please!]

*The entire Company turns to face the hall [and performs this parodic version of the liturgical prayer "Release us, O Lord!"]*⁴⁸

The COMPANY

Reculés de nobis.

[Back off now from *nobis* and get thee behind me Satan!]⁴⁹
Saint Rageaholic: Bitch! Get lost from *nobis*!
Saint Sweetie Pie: Come! Bring your ass toward *nobis*!
Saint Gab-Gab-Gabbie: Zip it about *nobis*!
Saint Cacklie: Don't you toil and trouble *nobis*!
Saint Shrew, Saint Harpie: Don't pussy-whip *nobis*!
Saint Thundercloud: Get off the cloud® of *nobis*!
Saint Stormie: Don't you throw your bolts at *nobis*!
Saint Prissy: Don't you dare look down on *nobis*!
Saint Gold Digger: You bitch! Get lost from *nobis*!
Saint Hot-to-Trot: Come! Bring your ass toward *nobis*!
Saint Green-Eyed Monster: Bitch! Get lost from *nobis*!
Saint Piece o' Shit: Don't dump all over *nobis*!
Saint Melancholy Babe: Show us your tits!
Yo! Lady Sainties? Hear the prayer of *nobis*?
Hello!
O Lord, hear our prayer:

[Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
Dona nobis—nobis panem
Dona nobis—nobis pacem
Give us this day our daily Starbucks. And most of all . . .]

O Lord, hear our prayer:
Yo, Lord, are you there?
Libera nos, Domine!
Release us, O Lord,
And for Chrissakes, deliver us from evil!

Let us pray:
O, libera nos, Domine:

[*The men pray.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

From nasty bitches one and all,
From fishwives, harpies, bust your balls,
Their brains are full o' pus, we pray:
[*All together*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*⁵⁰

[*The women pray, becoming more and more Motown as the scene proceeds
as a kind of singing competition ensues.*]

All Three PILGRIMESSES

From men who hit the bars at dawn
For speakin' Latin: Guys, come on!
They piss under the bar and spray:
[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The men pray.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

From slutty chicks who run around
All over, keep their husbands down,

Won't give the pussy-whipped their say:

[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The women pray.*]

All Three PILGRIMESSES

From gamblin' men who like blackjack,
Who'll hock the threads right off their back
To bet the farm the livelong day:

[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The men pray.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

From women who got greedy mitts,
A turned-up nose or tiny tits.
Don't need no bed for makin' hay!

[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The women pray.*]

All Three PILGRIMESSES

From men who keep their women quiet,
Scared shitless of a pussy riot:
They're jerks! Ain't that the *vérité*!

[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The men pray.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

From broads who're spendin' more and more
On getups fit for any whore,
So much, the man's got no *dîner*!

[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The women pray.*]

All Three PILGRIMESSES

From men who do it from the right

When chicks mount from the left at night.
It's all ass-backwards anyway!
[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

No candles when you crap! You heard?
You sit down on a steaming turd!
Marriage is full o' shit, I say!
[*In unison*] *O, libera nos, Domine!*

[*The men and women now pray together, intoning a new litany in rhymed octosyllabic couplets.*]⁵¹

The COMPANY

Oresmus: [let us pray.
Oresmus: not today:
O Lord, hear our prayer!
Yo, Lord! Are you there?
Te rogamus, audi nos!
Yo, Lord! We're *relig-i-ous*!]
God give us strength against our fate,
The tortures of the married state.
Our poor, trapped souls are stuck in there.
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

[*The men pray.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

When women yell and bitch and moan,
May patient men be left alone.
Give 'em a break, Lord, if you care:
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

All Three PILGRIMESSES

From lady-killers, pretty boys
And buff, stud-muffins—pretty boys,⁵²
Shootin' their mouths off, chasin' tail,
No Bro Code, Lord! Throw 'em in jail!

For everybody's good, we swear:
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

[*The men complete the prayer.*]

The Two MALE PILGRIMS

When wives decide to make a scene
With tons of insults, just plain mean,
Give us a break, Lord, if you care:
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

No one but us can whack their asses
No cuckolding, we're not jackasses!
Fuckin' dudes! Asses in the air!
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

If we've got some affairs in town,
Yo, Lord! The broads could simmer down.
Get 'em to zip it and beware!
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

Save us from bitching and bad moods
And sorrow! This ain't *Family Feud*!
Retract their claws, ease our despair:
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

[*The women, thoroughly transformed into Biddy and the Pilgrimettes, now proceed to a fully choreographed production number as they close the prayer. Biddy sings lead.*]

BIDDY and the PILGRIMETTES

May bride and groom be in the mood,[®]
All hot to trot and in the nude
'Cause marriage is for procreation:
Sex is for heirs, not recreation!
May they live long in wedded bliss!
There's heaven at the end o' this.
You'll be with God, the debonair:
O Lord, we beg you: hear our prayer!

[*Cue music. Since Bidly and the Pilgrimettes are a retro act, they begin with just the kind of spoken narrative introduction that preceded such classic tunes as "Leader of the Pack."*⁵³]

THE PILGRIMETTES

[And, ladies and gents, speakin' of the Lord and bein' into Him 'n' all. . . .

What *are* those priests wearing these days? I mean *seriously*:⁵³ have you checked out *those* threads?

And you Americans: what's the matter? You ain't never seen no *haute couture*? Gotta start at square one with you folks. You know what thread is, right?]⁵⁴

Te rogamus, audi nos!

BIDDY and the PILGRIMETTES

Thread for embroidery, thread from Lyon,
Thread from the Midi, thread from Avignon,
Thread from the Jura, and thread from Pairee,
Thread that's black, green thread, and gray thread! Look! See?
Thread made from sorrel, and linen thread too,
Thread for the morning and evening thread. Ooh!
Thread from Rouen, thread from great Norman cities,
Thread fit for spinning from places less pretty,
Thread double-sided for home when you spin,
Thread good for threading, thread outside or in,
Thread for a seam that won't rip cause it's tough,
Thread for the inseam, and thread of strong stuff.
Thread from Iran, yellow thread, thread to last,
Thread that's reversible . . . *and* colorfast.
Thread that's white. Ready now: one, two, three, sew!
Thread to match all colors of the rainbow!
Thread from a seamstress, sweet *mademoiselle*,
Who's gracious, spins pretty, who's lovely and *belle*,
Spinning thread spun by a dainty young thing,
Sweet little hands! Softer than anything,
Thread to wrap up, to create, and to mend,
Threads on my list that now comes to an end.

Losin' the thread here? Enough for a while!
Let's lift our spirits! Let's do it in style!
How 'bout a number, folks? What do you say?
How 'bout a song before we're on our way?

[*Interpolated modern adaptation begins here.*]

[Wait! Somethin' tells me, folks, that ain't enough!
You didn't get it? You know: the thread stuff?
How 'bout you hit the road toward your salvation
With one last stab at a modern translation?

{*Cue more music as the retro voice-over continues.*}

Now . . . as we were saying before:
What *are* those damn priests wearing these days?
I mean *seriously*: have you checked out *those* threads?
Come to think of it. . . . It's pretty clear *you* folks ain't been to church
for awhile. You know what they say: a picture's worth a thousand
words.

{*Inspired by Bill Maher's burqa fashion show, I suggest that the
marketplace give way to an ecclesiastical fashion show, complete with a
catwalk. A variety of clerics take to the runway in all their vestments.*⁵⁵
The dialogue then morphs into a game of the \$25,000 Pyramid.}

BIDDY

The collars and the gloves you newbies know,
The surplice and the cope from fabliaux. . . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Types of clothes!

BIDDY

The Bishop's miter, yes; the amice, nope!
The pallium and fanon: that's the Pope.
Chasuble means the *casula planeta*. . . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Weird names for clothes!

BIDDY

The cincture or the girdle hold them better:
The *alba*—that is, alb—around the waist.
Albae vestes are white 'cause that means chaste.

The PILGRIMETTES

Things that don't make you look fat!

BIDDY

In Latin, the alb goes by many names:
A *tunica linea*'s not the same
In Latin as what's called *alba romana*. . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Names for vintage clothes on eBay!

BIDDY

Sometimes those are in gold, like ripe bananas.
Camisia or sometimes *poderis*,
Another's called *tunica talaris*. . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Expensive clothes you find at Barneys?

BIDDY

Sometimes a linen alb is stitched in double:
No wool or cotton ones, or else there's trouble.
But there's no problem if they're made of hemp. . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Things you can smoke!

BIDDY

As long as priestly fellas ain't unkempt.
They're red and black and blue, velvet and silk.
I've now named albs, you see, of every ilk.

The PILGRIMETTES

Useless information about the material conditions of the late medieval stage!

BIDDY

All colors, shapes, and sizes, like rainbows!
But now I've had enough, God only knows!
Ecclesiastics: stuff is kinda tough. . . .

The PILGRIMETTES

Things church people wear!
{*Cue bells and whistles: that's the right answer.*}

BIDDY

Let's have some fun instead of all this stuff!
If you're a priest, that's quite the list o' threads
Give us this day a song, and fuck the bread!]

[*Interpolated modern adaptation ends here.*]

So put your lips together, folks, and blow!
We hope to hell that you enjoyed the show!

[*Possible closing music or maybe a parody of a parody, such as a send-up send-off à la Tom Lehrer: "The Vatican Rag(s)"*®]

The END

8.

Bitches and Pussycats, or, Butting Heads, Peace of Ass

*Les Deux Maris et leurs deux femmes dont l'une
a male tête et l'autre est tendre du cul*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

COLIN, the FIRST HUSBAND (Colin)

JUDE, the SECOND HUSBAND (Mathieu)

LEXIE, the FIRST WIFE (Alix)

JEAN, the SECOND WIFE (Jehanne)

[A Servant or two, plus two or three Children in the home of Colin and Lexie]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce moralisée à quatre personnages*, better known as *Les Deux Maris et leurs deux femmes dont l'une a malle teste et l'autre est tendre du cul*, appears as #10 in the *Recueil du British Museum*; another version survives under a slightly different name in the *Recueil de Copenhague*. First published in Lyon by Barnabé Chaussard, this “moralized farce” was edited by Viollet le Duc, *ATF*, 1: 145–78 (again, without verse numbers, so cited here by page number only); Picot and Nyrop, *Nouveau Recueil*, 115–61; and Tissier, #6 in *RF*, 1: 395–474. Tissier translated our farce into modern French as #6 in *FFMA*, 1: 121–44; and da Costa Martins, Amado Cordeiro, and Mendonça, into modern Portuguese (*Os Dois maridos e as suas duas mulheres*). Helpful summaries appear in Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #137 (165); and Faivre, *Répertoire*, #105 (275–77). Although *Bitches and Pussycats* is anonymous, Petit de Julleville speculates that, owing to a large number of learned Latin terms and phrases,

it “must have belonged to the repertoire of the Basochiens” (*RTC*, 165). The play is 635 octosyllabic verses (with a number of decasyllabic interludes). Alternative titles: *Hotheads or Hot to Trot*; *Head Case vs. Good Head*.

Plot

What is about to transpire in this play provides the perfect segue to the four spouse-swapping plays that conclude this anthology. In one corner, meet Colin and Lexie; in the other corner, Jude and Jean, two husbands and two wives complaining in stereo—make that in quadraphonic—about their (postpilgrimage) marriages. By now, the themes are nothing if not familiar, but this time it’s the variations that are intriguing. In one household (Colin and Lexie’s), there’s way too much of a bad thing—no surprise there—while, in the other (Jude and Jean’s), there’s way too much of a *good* thing. The dramatic originality of *Bitches and Pussycats* lies in who precisely is doing the complaining—the husband or the wife—and why. The answers turn out to be as instructive as they are original.

“Too much of a good thing?” you ask? “Really? For once?” Except that it’s not “for once.” Actually, this is the premise of #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, the point being: as farce does its damndest to keep a good woman down, it always gets it ass-backwards in the end. In the present play, it’s Jean’s end.

Nominally, our play is a *farce moralisée* although, as Petit de Julleville duly notes, there is nothing particularly moral about it (*RTC*, 165). If anything, the moral of the story is akin to the immortal—immoral?—words attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to a wide range of speakers from Groucho Marx to John Lennon: “Women should be obscene and not heard.” Whereas a play like *Shit for Brains* (*FF*, 252–58) contrasted a husband’s fat head with a wife’s fat ass, *Bitches and Pussycats* is a tongue-in-cheek, pseudomedical master class in women’s physiology, a farcical disquisition on what we now call the biological basis for behavior. Its claim to fame is its extensive sequences about the female head vs. the female asshole, which open up like so:

Reminiscent of scholastic disputation, lyric poetic contests (*puys*), and mock Basochial trials, the play begins musically. As in #6, *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, we are in the presence of another *tenson*, the musicoliterary term explicitly invoked by Colin as early as his second line (*ATF*, 1: 145) and followed several times by “counterpoint” (*contrepoint*) (e.g., 1: 145, 162, 164). At stake for the two debaters is this momentous question: Which is better (or worse)? A hotheaded woman like Lexie? Or an apparent floozy like Jean?

Harmonically, dissonantly, and anatomically speaking, the contrapuntal investigation turns on the “head” of a wife who is always “blowing her stack” (Lexie) versus the “ass” of another wife (Jean), whose bottom is both too leaky and too readily “lent out” to others (the latter, again, the anxiety that undergirds #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*). Jean is “soft down there,” *tendre du cul* (below, § “Language”) and, as usual, medieval comedy doesn’t go soft at the challenge of inquiring into her shortcomings. As *Bitches and Pussycats* charts its course from head to ass and back again, there is appreciable ambiguity as to which hole we’re talking about: mouth, ass, or vagina? The whole problem is a *hole* problem.

Jude proffers a handy prescription for any such marital pathology: if Jean’s flue is always open for any Tom, Harry, or Dick, the husband himself can plug that hole. (There is no Kettle-Maker from #3, *Pots and Scams*, to volunteer such services in his stead.) Furthermore, if this precursor of an anal plug results in the opposite pathology of constipation, then a simple enema, quoth Jude, ought to remedy the remedy. Both cures involve sticking it to Jean. She is dosed verbally in the form of relentless banalities, proverbs, mottoes, and clichés. (From the 2001 film *Amélie*, compare this to the wonderful proverb test imposed on the title character’s potential suitor, Nino.) And she’s dosed physically, in the form of . . . God only knows. One thing is clear: two halves don’t seem to make one hole.

But why not? Medical lore notwithstanding, is it really logical to exclude losing it from both ends? And why are Colin and Jude so worried about what flows from their wives’ orifices? Is it the specter of infidelity? Of oral sex? sodomy? menstruation?¹ Probably it’s all of the above. It’s sexual politics (im)pure and simple. It’s psychology as physiology and vice versa. And, by the way, it’s not all that far from the contemporary equivalent of medieval point-counterpoint: Twitter wars. I cannot help but recall that, at the time of this writing in 2015, Donald Trump caused another scandal after the first Republican presidential debate. When protesting what he deemed hot-headed questioning from moderator Megyn Kelly, Trump launched the salvo that “you could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever.”² Regardless of the time, place, or period of female leakage, the bottom line is the medical and pseudomedical politics of gender. In that sense, *Bitches and Pussycats* is *hysterical*. It is also of a piece with multiple misogynistic spins on how to get women to take their medicine. Consider the axiom that still passes for French differential diagnosis: stick one finger in the mouth and the other up the ass (*Un doigt dans la bouche, l’autre dans*

l'anus). Final answer? Men and women—buttheads that they are—are destined to *butt heads*.

By the same token, *Bitches and Pussycats* also presents the (pseudo)female perspective in one of those relatively rare farcical scenes of women tawking amongst themselves. In the feminized *tenison* of Scene 2, Lexie and Jean debate an earth-shaking question of their own: to cheat or not to cheat? Female scheming *à deux* appears elsewhere in the farcical repertoire, as in *Confession Lessons* (FF, 116–19); but, somehow, the wife and husband-swapping farces seem to bring it out (as for Cindy Lou, Charlotte, and Anna Nicole of #10, *Husband Swap*; for Jenny and Penny of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*; and for Gilly and Françoise of #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*). Lexie isn't interested in keeping the peace: any peace but Lexie's piece?³ Jean is interested only in sex to keep the piece: any piece (at any price), any piece of any action? Meanwhile, for Colin, this is most definitely “not his beautiful house, this is not his beautiful wife.”⁴ Even a theoretically sexually sated Jude wonders: “Well, how did I get here?”⁵ Will they be letting the days go by?⁶ To be determined—but, in *Bitches and Pussycats*, here is how they get there:

After Colin and Jude explore the issues at hand, they conspire to conduct scientific observation of the two female specimens. To put their biological houses in order, Jude will need to behold a hotheaded prude and, Colin, a hot-to-trot tramp. As we all know, comedy *does* love to hide its fools under tables, inside closets, or behind the curtains;⁴ so, along with the audience, each man will become a voyeur in the other's home. Once they have borne witness to the dual marital modes of vent and release, the moral of this *farce (im)moralisée* takes shape. Per the advice of the closing poetic set piece, female constipation is to be avoided at all costs, lest it cause hotheadedness. “Keep her lower vent open, boys,” intones Colin, “and let out the steam, lest the upper vent blow.” An enema will allegedly help with all that; but the true obscenity lies in how it would be administered. Female pipes need snaking out and, as was the case in *Playing Doctor* (FF, #6) or the *Farce of the Chimney Sweep* (*Farce du Ramonneur*), any medicine man's virile member certainly ought to be up for the “cleanse.”

But[t] not so fast. The “backed-up” boys of the Basoche obviously had plenty of their own frustrations to vent, as the mostly bourgeois gents tried to climb the social ladder⁵ while simultaneously bringing women down a rung, telling them, as it were, to “stick it up their asses.” Funny thing about the whole thing, though: once we have a better glimpse of what husbands are really like—paranoid, hot-tempered, and violent versus passive, pudgy, and

flaccid—the female dichotomy of hotheaded versus loose-bottomed doesn’t sound half bad. Any spouse but especially any *wife*—and any spectator—might well be tempted to swap, the very plotline of our final four plays. That is . . . if we can believe anything that anybody says about his or her marital state of affairs in the first place. Is Colin as dumb as he looks? Does Lexie really shun offerings in her temple? Does Jean fuck her husband as much as she says she does? Does Jude even like sex? This is a character-driven drama in which scheming, plotting, and plot are best understood in terms of our next category. Hint: there is considerably more at stake than the superficial dichotomy implied by both Faivre (*Répertoire*, 275) and Tissier (*FFMA*, 1: 123) between a faithful fishwife and a snugly slut.

Characters and Character Development

Let’s meet our first lovely couple, Colin and Lexie. Together for the first time in Scene 4, they are fighting about getting dinner on the table (as in Scene 1 of #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*). We do not know Colin’s profession but, whatever it is, he’s not very good at it. Like many of the cobblers we’ve encountered in other plays, he is not much of a breadwinner, which naturally piques Lexie’s ire. It also bears mentioning that there are a great many “Colins” in French farce, many of them poor schmucks and unsuccessful businessmen, dolts of every stripe. They’re all over the place—we’ll meet another one in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*—but *this* Colin is unusually cruel. He is not only beset with fear, distress, and distraction: he is nasty, insulting, abusive, violent, and even given to murderous instincts. Beyond his very nasty insults about Lexie’s ugliness, the hot-tempered Colin is far more deadly than his hotheaded wife. For example, despite all the good counsel that he receives from Jude in Scene 1, Colin will ultimately do precisely what his pal discourages: beat his wife (in Scene 4), lending tragic dimensions to all the events (below, § “Sets and Staging”). Yes, Colin is plainly not getting any action at home—but why would he? He is despicable. However, the lack of sex on the home front only fuels his paranoia that Lexie might be getting it elsewhere. (She’s *not*, so she says; but the whole point of Scene 2 is that maybe she *should be*.) In a way, paranoia is Colin’s main character trait (and one that will be shared by Julian of #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*). As for his interaction with BFF Jude, Colin’s idea of friendship is that misery loves company; and, if misery doesn’t exist already, he will gladly help to create it. As brutally honest with Jude as he is brutal toward his wife, Colin is crafty, sinister, and

insensitive to the emotions of either sex: enough to wear Jude down until his buddy consents to the voyeuristic experiments. Moreover, all of Colin's character flaws are likely exacerbated by his tendency to drink too much. He regularly drowns the very sorrows that he is responsible for creating; so let's not forget the nefarious effects of prodigious alcohol consumption on a man's sexual prowess. In a word, the key to Colin's character is dangerous excess in all things. An updated Colin type might smoke too much too, thereby enabling a feminist reinterpretation of who it is that really blows . . . a full head of steam. Casting a bald actor as Colin might help to highlight the real culprit: a man who is a "dickhead" as well as an asshole.

So what about Lexie? Is she or isn't she ugly, constipated, and protopuritanical? If farce warrants that bitter prudes are ugly, then Lexie might well be as uncomely as Colin says. But Scene 4 also makes it crystal clear that she didn't use to be. Daily venting is exhausting: it's marriage that did her looks in. I've translated her French name (Alix) as "Lexie" because *lex* in Latin means "law," picking up on her letter-of-the-law attitude toward such virtues as chastity. It's just that prissy Lexie has the mouth of stevedore. Indeed, if there is comedy at all to be found in the over-the-top interactions of Couple Number One, it derives not from the beatings administered by Colin, nor from what I interpret to be his sneering and menacing expressions of affection, but from the preference of both for utterly filthy language when pontificating about sexual abstinence. Corporeally speaking, and like Biddy of our previous play, Lexie might be Molière's Arsinoé avant la lettre, the poor prig from *The Misanthrope* who makes up for in Bible thumping what she lacks in sex appeal. And here's another thought, in light of Lexie's line about treating her body like a temple: try picturing her as an emaciated, vegetarian, parvenue, Whole Foods shopper who might feel a little better if she'd indulge in a little beefcake now and then. Lexie is highly emotional, agitated, and distraught, easily working herself into a crying jag. Come to think of it, a contemporary shrink would have a field day applauding her ability to access the sadness masked by her anger. Wild unkempt hair would suit the character well—compare her to Persephone of our next play—as Lexie loses control. And there's something else: Faivre buys Lexie's whole line about abstinence (*Répertoire*, 276) but, interestingly enough, Jean doesn't. And, since Jean is more clever than her friend (and than Faivre?), the possibility that Lexie truly *is* stepping out on the vile Colin would lend fuel to his righteous fire at the same time that it would make a serious dent in any protofeminist reading of the play. If anything, Lexie might be portrayed as a tragic figure

exemplary of some of the travails borne by medieval women. There is even a disturbing implication in Scene 2 that she accepts the abuse as a necessary evil (see note 34).

Meanwhile, over at Couple Number Two's, things are going wondrous well . . . and not so well, depending on one's perspective . . . and depending on whether Jude is exaggerating. When we first meet Jude, he strikes us as a pretty nice guy. (Technically, the Second Husband is "Matthew," but I've taken some liberties for the sake of wordplay. I mean: both Matthew and Jude wrote Gospels, right?) For quite some time during Scene 1, Jude is in possession of nobler instincts, advising Colin sensibly and repeatedly that his friend should never beat his wife but, rather, seek the appropriate medical remedy. In point of fact, Jude is so reasonable that he's almost a forerunner to Molière's *raisonneur* (usually some "Dorante" or other). And yet, while this should be an easy game, set, match—and match, point, counterpoint—for the savvy Jude against the troubled Colin, that's not what happens. Instead, it is the persistent Colin who manages to elicit a stunning admission from Jude, which handily demonstrates that nothing is what it seems. Farcical logic would surely dictate that a man be elated to be married to a nympho; but the whole thing makes Jude nervous. So much so that, like Sir Allcock of #2, *The Shithouse*, our potentially pudgy, paunchy Jude overcompensates for his pusillanimity with food and drink. As with his chum, Colin, all that anxious overindulgence might be getting him down. But why is the initially boastful Jude scared of sex? Has familiarity bred contempt even for extra-alimentary consummation? In Scene 6, Jude is as slow on the uptake as Allcock, here when Jean grumbles that Jude is all talk and no action. What, then, of his ability to perform for his overperforming wife? Readers and actors must decide whether, for all the salacious talk, any sex actually occurs between Jude and Jean.⁶ The thing is: just because you're paranoid, that doesn't that she's *not* out to get you. In Scene 2, Jean appears to avow that she is indeed open for business, such that, for Faivre, the entire play constitutes a prescription for the adultery of an open marriage (*Répertoire*, 276). For myself, *Bitches and Pussycats* overflows with panic in the face of unrestrained female sexuality; and, at bottom, the state of holy deadlock countenances no such sexual liberation.

Lastly, Jean is a charming coquette for whom any number of fun names would have worked in translation: Randy, Jezzie (for Jezebel), Pussy Galore (à la James Bond), or—again, following #7, *Holy Deadlock*—another Juicy Lucy or, even better, a Goosey Lucy. But she is Jean in French (Jehanne); and there are excellent pun-related reasons to retain the original. Her bottom line? This

wife by any other name would still be a classic leaky vessel, her various orifices ever the subject of dispute and disputation. Dramaturgically, her physiological situation should say it all. Personally, I see Mae West (even though it's foul-mouthed Lexie who gets Mae's best lines); and you will hear, as I do, the dulcet tones of Freddie Mercury on "Fat-Bottomed Girls."⁶ Unlike best friend Lexie, Jean has plenty of money on hand. Although we don't know exactly how she comes by it, it could be great fun to animate its sources in pantomime. Interestingly enough, whereas uptight Lexie uses exceptionally blue language, the so-called slut, Jean, tends to be more prudish in her speech. She has some facility with the catechism but, since her mastery of Latin is poor, she becomes yet another lightning rod for Basochial satire, the literal butt of their in-jokes.⁷ Even so, deficiencies in Latin in no way compromise the character's intelligence. Jean is smart. Very smart. Probably smarter than them all as she plays the superior *raisonneuse* to her husband *raisonneur*. In contradistinction to the very different moral of the Seinfeldian farce in which George exhibits unusual clarity and brainpower during a period of abstinence ("The Abstinence," 1996), Jean finds that all that sex serves to clear her head.

One more thing: in Scene 4, Lexie refers a single time, apparently demonstratively, to the *povres petis enfans* (1: 162). This could well be an invitation to cast nonspeaking extras as the play suffers the little children. Do note that "nonspeaking" doesn't mean they can't make plenty of noise. As in *Shit for Brains* (FF, #7), the kiddos might roam about their parents' crumbling home, an apt tragicomic symbol of their crumbling marriage.

Language

The main challenge posed by this play is how to translate its proverbial wisdom that all women fall into two categories related to the head and the ass: *malle teste* versus *tendre du cul*. The moral of the story, articulated at both the end of Scene 1 and the end of the play, is *Icy concluons qu'il n'est femme / Qu'il n'ayt mal cul ou malle teste* (1: 152–53). With double negatives that befit all the double trouble, the tag line means literally: "Thus we conclude that there is no woman who has neither a bad head nor a bad ass." In translation, this *embarras du choix* leads to an embarrassment of filthy riches (and filthy witches). It's all part and parcel of the centerpiece treatise on psychology, physiology, gender, and sexuality. *Malle teste* ("bad head") connotes a hot-head or a spitfire; and *tendre du cul* ("one of tender ass/asshole") suggests a hot-to-trot piece of ass, a loose woman, and even a "badass." The better to

preserve those multiple meanings, I've rendered the counterpoint of *malle teste* versus *tendre du cul* several ways throughout: bad-mouth versus badass; head case versus good head (remember Holly Goodhead from the 1979 Bond film *Moonraker*?); and pussycat versus pussy-whipped. In Middle French, the revelation of this folk wisdom is a linguistic tour de force, beginning with the gents' opening musicopoetic set piece, which is riddled with wordplay on the terms for biting, bitching, and death (*mors/mort/morir/mordre*).⁸ It gains more *éclat* still from a homonymy that borders on onomatopoeia. Consider the rhymed pair of *hélas* ("alas") and *ès latz* (caught in a "net" or a "trap"). Better yet, consider *Laissons la là* (1: 146)—"Let's leave all that aside"—but which sounds like singing (see notes 11, 51).

Other fascinating features of *Bitches and Pussycats* include the paratextual use of Latin. That is to say that readers *see it* but the characters do not *speak it*. At one point, there is a reference to the Second Husband as *Secundus* and the first as *Primus* (1: 160); at another, stage directions indicate in Latin that Lexie and Jean are weeping (*plorando*) (1: 154, 163, 174). Why, you might wonder, is that important? Because it tells us something about not only who wrote this farce but who was meant to read and perform it. Most likely, as Petit de Julleville surmised (*RTC*, 165), the intended authors, readers, and performers were highly educated (overeducated?) Basochiens. On the page alone, they found plenty of ways to mock women like Jean, their syntactically correct stage directions making for a striking contrast with the garbled grammatical mess of Jean's *latin de cuisine* or "kitchen Latin" (*FF*, 373–74).

Consistent with the *tenson*-like (and *tension*-laden) atmosphere and the changing versification patterns from octosyllables to decasyllables, I have recourse to poetic interludes, singsongy dialogue, and iambic pentameter, all the while emphasizing their musicality by means of production numbers (below, § "Sets and Staging"). That musicality extends, moreover, to certain liturgical resonances. Believe it or not, when Jude eavesdrops on the hell on earth that is Colin's marriage, he compares the acts and scenes of her "drama" to the parts of the Mass (1: 161–62).

Sets and Staging

Three or four sets are required: the respective dwellings of the two couples; a bar or a tavern; and, perhaps, the marketplace. Jude and Jean's place is grandiose, elegant, well stocked, and well appointed, whereas Colin and Lexie's place is a mess. The bedroom of the latter couple has thick curtains and some sort of

closet, which could be either an American walk-in or part of an armoire. Both homes call for hiding places, which can be as funny as desired. I've also suggested a tavern as a hospitable site for some of the musical counterpoint—compare this with the ambience of #9, *Wife Swap*—where the more pointed or hackneyed the musical clichés, the better. Think dinner theater. A fourth set might be fashioned for the women's Scene 2, in which they could stroll through a busy marketplace. The better-heeled Jean might be shopping for jewelry as overextended Lexie returns from doing her laundry at the town *lavoir*. Additionally, the play's specific references to Paris and Rome might be reflected in set design.

One question that arises concerns the time of day of the events. When Colin returns home in Scene 4, Lexie denounces the state he's in, prompting us to ask: Just how early on have the boys been out drinking? Given Jude's need for alcohol, he could really be soused at any hour of the day or night. Colin's allusions to dining imply the midday meal, which would also be the right time for Lexie and Jean to meet up in town. Alternatively, one might envisage the New World timing of supper, with the men still out on the town drowning their sorrows at last call. Boys' night out?

During the alternately delicious, alternately disgusting Scene 4 (1: 160–68), I have reattributed a number of lines to the hidden Jude. Whereas they are technically spoken by Colin in the *Recueil du British Museum* (RBM, B-i–iv), the dialogue is funnier, snappier, and more rapid-fire if it belongs to Jude's blow-by-blow commentary on the domestic scene that he is watching. Indeed, I suspect that this is what a tired copyist or author had in mind (see note 42). However, as Colin smacks Lexie around, staging the humor involves a more literal blow-by-blow that should probably lean toward the hyperreal lest it become unpalatable. In that same scene, another interesting dramaturgical question arises: Where is Jean? The women linger at the end of Scene 2; so Jean could conceivably remain onstage to observe the proceedings at Colin and Lexie's place, gathering intel of her own about these not-so-Bergmanesque scenes from a marriage.

Above all, the principal theatrical strategy of our play—and a highly self-conscious one at that—is that everything about marriage is double trouble. In a theatrical version of cinematic crosscutting, we jump from male to female advice giving (1: 148; 153) and from one household to the other. Although Faivre pronounced this technique obtrusive and predictable (*Répertoire*, 276), doubling up and doubling down is what *Bitches and Pussycats* is all about. For that reason, I've (re)created production numbers that reprise the doubling motif in speech, song, dance, rap, and the like, thereby stressing ever-dual in-

terpretations. Personally, I'd vote for the feminist reappropriation that transforms female hothead versus hot to trot into male dickhead versus asshole.

Costumes and Props

In a further echo of #2, *The Shithouse* (§ "Language"), there is a generous spread of roast partridge with all the trimmings in the home of Jude and Jean, where a fire burns at a cozy hearth. Nearby, there are various implements such as bellows, fire pokers, and the like. Jude and Jean also maintain a particularly impressive bar that is well stocked with excellent wines, plenty of the hard stuff, and a superb bottle ostentatiously on display. At Colin and Lexie's untidy place, there are dishes piling up as far as the eye can see and the nose can smell. The libations should come down a notch: lots of beer and, depending on how much anachronism is deemed witty, some boxed wines and takeout containers, pizza boxes, or crumpled bags from fast-food joints could be strewn here and there. Need I add—dare I say?—that, as befits the proposed course of action, the medicine cabinet ought to be as well stocked as the bar: enema bags, bottles of Kaopectate, stacks of Imodium, buckets of prunes, and so on. Don't let the excess go to your head.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

"Once in a Lifetime." ["Letting the days go by"]. By David Byrne, Brian Peter George Eno, Christopher Frantz, Jerry, Harrison, Martina Weymouth. BMI Work #1117241.

"Fat-Bottomed Girls." By Brian Harold May. BMI Work #406587.

"Sixteen Tons." By Merle Travis. BMI Work #1351682.

"What'd I Say." By Ray Charles. BMI Work #1631628.

"You Light Up My Life." By Joe Brooks. ASCAP Work ID: 550087093.

"76 Trombones!" By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 490040443.

"Ebony and Ivory." By Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work ID: 350091377.

"Ain't It a Shame." By Dave Bartholomew and Antoine "Fats" Domino. BMI Work #13953.

"You Had a Do Wacka Do." By Roger Miller. BMI Work #1719799.

"Time of the Season." By Rod Argent. BMI Work #1516893.

"Hey Jude." By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work ID: 380129566.

“Day-O.” [“The Banana Boat Song.”] Traditional Jamaican folk song.
 “Bad.” By Michael Jackson. BMI Work #78860.
 “Hard to Handle.” By Alvertis Isbell, Allen Alvoid Jones Jr., and Otis Redding. BMI Work #526855.
 “Dang Me.” By Roger Miller. BMI Work #275944.
 “All Night Long.” By Lionel Richie. ASCAP Work ID: 310227957.
 “Just the Two of Us.” By Ralph MacDonald, William Salter, and William Harrison Withers. ASCAP Work ID: 400081381.
 “Man of Constant Sorrow.” Traditional.
 “Ride Like the Wind.” By Christopher Cross. ASCAP Work ID: 480144485.
 “Bad Boy.” By Larry Dermer, Joe Galdo, and Rafael Vigil. BMI Work #79088.
 “Show Me.” By Joseph Arrington Jr. [Joe Tex]. BMI Work #1334574.
 “What’s New, Pussycat?” By Burt F. Bacharach and Hal David. ASCAP Work ID: 530135809.
 “The Diva Song.” By Sarah Silverman.⁹
 “Master of the House.” By Alain Boublil, Herbert Kretzmer, Jean-Marc Natel, and Claude-Michel Schonberg. ASCAP Work ID: 883148796.
 “The Vatican Rag.” By Tom Lehrer. ASCAP Work ID: 520035829.
 “Lithium.” By Kurt Cobain. BMI Work #876656.
 “Bitch.” By Meredith Brooks and Shelly Peiken. BMI Work #4047070.
 “Riders on the Storm.” By John Paul Densmore, Robert A. Krieger, Raymond D. Manzarek, and Jim Morrison. ASCAP Work ID: 480092095.

[Scene 1]

*[The two husbands have met up at a bar near their homes. They might open with a vaudevillian routine that culminates in a tap dance.]*¹⁰

COLIN, the FIRST HUSBAND, *begins*

Want some fun at home? Hey! whaddaya get?
 Make sixteen puns:® do you still get the gal?
 Whatcha say?¹¹

JUDE, the SECOND HUSBAND

What'd I say?®

What's the trouble there, pal?

Another day older and deeper in debt?®

So what's wrong?

COLIN

Life's a bitch.

I got trouble. You bet!

JUDE

You got trouble? Who with?

COLIN

With my wife! With my gal!

Want some fun at home? Hey! whaddaya get?

Make sixteen puns: do you still get the gal?

JUDE

Mine's not like that at all! Does me good. A coquette!

And she sings and she plays. She's a femme fatale!

COLIN

And mine harps and she brays. It's a goddamn chorale.

Which is why I was askin'—you seem to forget:

Want some fun at home? Hey! whaddaya get?

Make sixteen puns: do you still get the gal?

Whatcha say?

JUDE

What'd I say?®

What's the trouble there, pal?

Another day older and deeper in debt?®

COLIN

You want I should take notes?

Fine. Get ready, get set. . . . And she's off!

What's the use? I say fiddle-de-dee!

How 'bout me melody? How's about a duet?
'Cause with mine, bark's as bad as her bite, pal, you bet!
It's all point-counterpoint! Plus she stings like a bee.
And the stink-eye alone says, "Screw you, SOB!"
What's a man gonna do except croak from the strife?
I say: bite me, you barkin' bitch! Lord, hear my plea
'Cause you gave me a helluva shrew for a wife!

JUDE

Mine's like manna from heaven. She lights up my life.®

COLIN

Whatcha say?

JUDE

What'd I say?® That she comes when I call.

COLIN

And I got me a fishwife, just twistin' the knife.
Stuck for life with the bitchiest bitch of 'em all!
What she wants is to string up her man by the balls!
She's a bitch on the prowl, she's a cat on the hunt.
She'll do any man, like it was nothin' at all.
In a word, *nota bene*: my wife is a cunt.

JUDE

I say: dude, she's a prude.

COLIN

Gonna tell you up front:¹²
Okay, fine, I'll admit it! But at least I'm pretty damn sure she's not a slut or a whore. Except here's the thing: she's bossy. She knows what she wants, and she kinda just takes charge. Master of her domain, you know? She's bad. What can I say? Ain't a bitch in this town she don't best with her worst. She's always on my case about something. I swear to God it's all: [*Imitating his wife*] "It's not *my* fault! *I'm* not the one who did *this*! *I'm* not the one who did *that*!" Same old song. And, by the way, a full octave higher than the score!® Plus you should hear

it when she throws one of her fits. Screamin' at the top of her lungs!
Howlin' like a banshee!

JUDE

So I'm guessing it's fair to say that you couldn't possibly imagine the pleasure I get off my juicy little Jeannie. That's right: I've got to give credit where credit is due. It doesn't matter where I've been. The only thing she's got to say to me is: [*Imitating his own wife*] "Welcome home, darling."¹³ And then she . . . takes care of me. Would you like to know how? If only I could put it into words. All I can tell you is that being with her is like heaven on earth!

COLIN

Ergo, final answer: You're in charge. I get it. Master of your domain.¹⁴

JUDE

You don't believe me?

COLIN

[*Looking around at the audience*] It's not that, but. . . Come on, it's just the two of us here. Little pussycat wouldn't be steppin' out on you, would she?

JUDE

I should say not! No way.¹⁵

COLIN

Say, buddy, come on: face the music. It's not like it's never been done before. You know what they say about a party girl: she'll do unto others like she's doin' unto you. You know. A good-time gal. Better watch your back. And *her* backside because, when the cat's away. . . What do you say?¹⁶

JUDE

That a man ought to know when he's got himself a good thing or the hell with him! What he doesn't know won't hurt him. Same goes for me: hear no evil, see no evil.

COLIN

Sure, but, dude, people will talk. You've got a reputation to consider.

JUDE

To hell with the man who gets bent outta shape about it! What? Me worry? All I can tell you is, if I don't want to know, I don't ask.

COLIN

How do you figure?

JUDE

What the hell would I go nosing around in her business for? To find out what I don't want to know? Seek not and ye shall not find!

COLIN

Are you fuckin' crazy? There's gotta be a way to put her to the test. Crafty-like. And I better see what that wife o' *mine's* up to.

JUDE

It seems to me that your little test will do more harm than good. And what, pray tell, do you propose to do if you catch her in the act?

COLIN

What'll I do? Jesus H. Christ! I'll kill her.

JUDE

Do it and you're a dead man.

COLIN

How do you figure?

JUDE

You'll hang by the neck until you're dead.

COLIN

Okay, fine. So I'll beat her instead.

JUDE

What do you mean? Beat a good woman, she goes bad; beat a bad one, she gets even worse. Dude, don't you know the old proverb about separating the wheat from the chaff? Only a bad man beats bad wheat.¹⁷ [As you sow, so shall you weep. Avoid the bitter harvest. Don't throw good money after bad. In other words:] You want to be a brute and beat up your wife? If there's anything good in her, you'll beat it right out of her. What can I say? Don't beat the hand that feeds you!

COLIN

So what's the solution?

JUDE

Do not lay a hand on your wife. As long as she . . . shows you a good time, that's all that matters.

COLIN

My wife? Not much danger in that. Nothing to fear on that end.

JUDE

So what the hell are you afraid of?

COLIN

She's a hothead! It's all yellin' and screamin' at my place, wherever I been. [She's a real head case.]

JUDE

Oh yeah? My trouble's at the other end. [If you wanna know the {w}hole story. . .] It's her ass that scares me. Or, more precisely, her *asshole*.

COLIN

Her ass? Her asshole? What?

JUDE

I've heard things. Been given to understand that . . . she's *easy*. Hot to trot. A piece of ass.¹⁸

COLIN

Piece of ass? Good God almighty, man, count your lucky stars! I'd rather go head to head and butt to butt with yours any day o' the week! Don't you get it? Hot to trot beats hothead hands down. And what do you have to say about that?

JUDE

All yours needs is a good enema. To release the pressure, clear her head. Snap, crackle, pop! So she won't blow her top!

COLIN

You're kidding, right?

JUDE

Head her off at the ass, I say! If you want to shut her up, all she needs is a good enema.

COLIN

But what if she starts up with the yellin' and screamin' again? As usual.

JUDE

Jesus wept! All she needs is a good enema. To release the pressure, clear her head. Snap, crackle, pop! So she won't blow her top!

COLIN

Come again?

JUDE

Works like a charm, I tell you. Now: you've got your hothead, your spitfire. And she's full o' hot air. What can I say? Stick it up her ass! But if she takes her medicine down there: end of story. Allow me to explain. You can't have her "backed up." Contents under pressure. All that hot air's gotta come out *somewhere*, otherwise she blows her stack. You've got to keep that valve open at all times. [*Colin looks perplexed.*] Bitch gotta let off some steam.

COLIN

Well, I'll be damned. That's amazing . . . if it works. But what about that badass o' yours? Holy shit! Dude: What are you gonna do about her asshole?

JUDE

A little Kaopectate ought to do the trick. Need her constipated. It's *axiomatic*. Get it?

COLIN

Are you out of your mind?¹⁹ You just told me that a bitch blows her top if you don't keep her bottom open for business. And now you say you need her constipated? [Wait, Kaopectate? {*He indicates the audience.*} Seriously, dude: you think this bunch o' jokers don't know a fucking anachronism when they see one?] Surely you understand that all the smoke's just gonna rush right back up to her head, and she'll be blowin' her stack at you in no time! Nonstop bitchin' and yellin' [just like at my place]!

JUDE

In which case, I'd rather she get the enema.

COLIN

Final answer?

JUDE

I'd say so, yes.

COLIN

Ergo: by that logic, we got no choice: it's hothead or hot to trot. It's head case or good head. It's pussycat or pussy-whipped! Ain't no woman out there who's not blowin' her top or tellin' us to go blow!

JUDE

No offense there, ladies, but, that's what we're saying. You heard it here first: there's not a woman out there where it's not one or the other. She's either bitchin', yellin', and screamin', or she's shakin' her ass for every Tom, Harry, or Dick! *LHOOQ*.²⁰

COLIN

You heard it here folks! When it comes to women, it's pussycat or pussy-whipped!

[Doubled version for a musical number begins here.]

COLIN

That's it?

JUDE

That's it: that's all I've got.

COLIN

A hothead or she's hot to trot!

One or the other: dude, you're stuck!

JUDE

Don't flip out girls: like it or not,

A hothead or she's hot to trot!

She'll bitch, she'll moan with all she's got

Or shake her ass so, gents, you're stuck.

COLIN

That's it: hotheads or hot to trot!

One or the other. Dudes, you're fucked.

[Doubled version ends here.]

[Scene 2]

[The action takes place at a public space in town, perhaps the marketplace, where Lexie and Jean might be people watching.]

LEXIE, the FIRST WIFE

So girl, I don't know what to do:

Put up with it?

JEAN

No flippin' way!

LEXIE

Oh come on, girl: it's just us two.
So girl, I don't know what to do:
There's me. There's men: I'm asking you:
There's my good name:²¹ What do you say?
So, girl, I don't know what to do:
Put up with it?

JEAN

No flippin' way!
You're classy. Ain't been led astray.
Good God! You best us all!

LEXIE

It's true! Damn straight.
[But do I just hang in there? Grin and bear it?²²

JEAN

I told you: no flippin' way!]

LEXIE

You know Mister Greatwhite,²³ right? Girl! His son must've asked my dad for my hand in marriage like five hundred times, I swear to God.

JEAN

I'll take your word for it. But . . . so . . . you really shoulda gone for him.
Especially seeing as it was God's will and all. That's more the kinda fella
He had in mind for you. My goodness, dear!

LEXIE

And what do you mean God's will? What the fuck?

JEAN

You know what they say: "A good man is hard to find." Same old, same old, wherever you go. Paris, Rome. . . .²⁴ There's always some joker keeping a good woman down. Then again there's always some nasty bitch somehow manages to snag herself a good one.²⁵ That's just the way the cookie crumbles.

LEXIE

[*Sotto voce*] Yeah, right. She means: a hard man is good to find. As for me . . .]

I'll be goddamned if that fucker ever gives me a moment's peace! Just thinkin' about it's enough to make my blood boil! [*She clutches her chest and bursts into tears.*]

Weeping. [Plorando]

JEAN

Snap out of it!

LEXIE

Just the other day, he got me into such a state that I came this close to just doin' it. Oh yeah.²⁶

JEAN

[*Playfully*] Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. You oughta be ashamed. What a very bad girl you are, you are!²⁷

LEXIE

Yeah, well maybe if I'da had the courage . . . like *some* people—not namin' names, of course—I woulda just done it. You hear me? But I swear [*indicating the audience*]: God can strike me dead if I ever gave it up to any man out there! And I'll have you know that it's not for lack of opportunities! I've had the classiest men in town after me. Priests too. More than any woman in this town.

JEAN

So, if one might inquire: What the hell were you waiting for? [Some reticence, perhaps, with regard to their priestly offering?]

LEXIE

Here's the thing: up till now, I've lived a life beyond reproach. Bummer—I mean, praise the Lord! And that's just what I'm gonna keep on doin' for as long as we both shall live.

JEAN

Well good for you, sister! Praise the Lord! Good. I, however, take a slightly different view. The way I see it, I can pleasure as many of the right kinda men as I feel like. As long as it's all done in secret. Very much to my credit, I'd say.

LEXIE

I swear! What a very bad girl you are, you are! Girl.

JEAN

Oh shut up! Everybody's doin' it. [When I'm good, I'm very, very good, and when I'm bad, I'm better.] And don't you think for one minute that you're not next in line, lady. Ticktock.

LEXIE

It'll be a cold day in hell. I'd sooner be thrown to the wolves . . . and eaten alive.²⁸

JEAN

Sure you would. That's what *I* used to say. Me and all them others who wound up doing all kinds of stuff that's even worse. Surely you remember that girl? The aunt of my brother's sister?²⁹ [*Both women pause in utter confusion.*] Poor thing waited and waited. And waited. She must've been fifty years old by the time she finally gave it up! And to her confessor, no less!

LEXIE

Ave Maria! They shoulda burned her at the stake! Or hanged her.

JEAN

You got *that* right: for waiting so long!

LEXIE

No, for committing a mortal sin.

JEAN

No, for not doing it sooner.

LEXIE

Sooner? What the hell are you talkin' about? She already came around way too early. Way ahead o' the game.

JEAN

No, behind! Pay attention now, Lex:³⁰ *Ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence.* [*Lexie looks confused.*] "Sinning in silence is no sin at all!"³¹ [What? you never read no Molière?] [*Lexie still looks confused.*] It's not a sin if nobody sees it! It's only natural to get a little lovin'. [Does a body good.] And take it from me, honey: a little splash o' the holy water washes it all away. Hallelujah, amen!³²

LEXIE

If you say so.

JEAN

Amen to that, sister! In the name of Saint Nutball—You heard me! Saint Nutball!³³—it's the God's honest truth. Why, just the other day, I heard our priest, Brother Dick, saying—remember this from catechism?—that when God . . . spake unto Eve and shit, he said: "*Multipliamini, crescite et replete terram!*" [*Lexie looks confused again.*] "Be fruitful and multiply," babe! [*She indicates the audience.*] So I ask you: If all the ladies out there are just following God's holy commandments, then how could it possibly be a sin?

LEXIE

Well, technically, it's not. But I do believe He meant with their *husbands*.

JEAN

Yes, but what if they're not up to it?

LEXIE

Oh, please. Gimme a break! But since you've got it all worked out, go on, knock yourself out. Do whatever you want. Whoever you want. But no one lays a hand on *this* body except my husband, and that's final. I don't care if you gotta go all the way to Paris to find a bigger prick.³⁴

JEAN

As for *moi*, I've got the best husband there ever was. Whenever he gets in, it's all: [*Imitating her husband as the men did earlier*] "Come on over here, my little pussycat." Just like that. And then, I wrap my arms around him, like so. And then, I go: "Oh, my darling, I barely ever see enough of you. As long as you're here and we find ourselves in this position, how's about a little kiss?"

And then he's like: "Okay, okay."

And then I fuck him. [*And he purrs like a kitten. Works every time.*]

And that, my dear, is why we got no trouble at home.

LEXIE

That's not exactly how it goes at our place. How's about I hum a few bars for you:

"Forget it, prick!"

[*Imitating her husband*] "Forget it, bitch!" "Old bat, fuck you!" He's got a hundred thousand of 'em just like that. Every time we talk, same old song. What can I say? We're not exactly living together in perfect harmony.[©]

JEAN

Ain't that a shame.[©] But what's the problem between you two anyway?

LEXIE

You're playin' dumb, right? Surely you know that I am, always was, and always will be the kinda woman who treats her body like a temple? Not one false move outta me.

JEAN

Uh-huh, sure. If you say so.

[*Aside to the audience*] That's your story and you're stickin' to it. Tell me another one.

LEXIE

But that's the whole point, my dear: I maintain that, on that basis alone, he owes *this* woman better than anyone else.

JEAN

That makes sense.

LEXIE

[*Gasping*] Would you look at the time! I gotta get on home. Bye-bye for now, hon.

[*Neither woman makes a move.*]

JEAN

I do believe you're right. We'd best be on our way. Without further ado.

LEXIE

Whacka-do, whacka-do, whacka-do.® I'm off. It's the time of the season for leavin'.®

JEAN

We're outta here!

LEXIE

I gotta get on home. Bye-bye for now, hon.

[*The women remain where they are, waiting for . . . Godot?, and communicate in mime, thus giving the men time to get to Colin's house first.*]

[Scene 3]

[*Back at the bar*]

COLIN

Hey Jude.® Wanna come over my place? Check out my wife? You won't believe the ruckus till you hear it! Whaddaya say? You in?

JUDE

I'll go, but under one condition: you, good buddy, are comin' to hear mine after I've heard yours.

COLIN

We're just gonna have to find you a good place to hide.

JUDE [*Secundus*]

I can always hide in the closet. Or behind the curtains, if you got 'em.³⁵

[*They leave for Colin's house.*]

[Scene 4]

[*The home of Colin and Lexie is a mess. It's mealtime, so the children, if cast, are up to all sorts of mischief, with Lexie chasing after them, giving the husbands an opportunity to sneak in discreetly. Colin scouts a number of spots and installs Jude in his hiding place.*]

COLIN [*Primus*]

Hello! Yo! Anybody home?

LEXIE

Well glory be! If it ain't the lord and master!³⁶ Quick! Roll out the red carpet! It's almost dinnertime!

COLIN

God give you good day, Lexie.

LEXIE

Fuck you! And where the hell have you been? Just look at the state you're in this time!

COLIN

Fuck me? Let's not get into that again, dear.

LEXIE

You oughta be ashamed o' yourself, I swear!

COLIN

I presume that we shall be dining soon?

LEXIE

Let's review the situation, shall we?

He comes home drunk as a skunk and, then, *Monsieur* inquires about dining. I'll be goddamned.

[*To the audience as if he were a keg*] Allow me to demonstrate. Let's see now: What do we have on tap? If you just twist his nose like so, three mugs'll come out right about . . . here!³⁷

JUDE, *from his hiding place, says:*

Ouch! Talk about your hell, fire, and brimstone! What ever happened to "Peace be with you, Brother"? And this divine service is just gettin' started!³⁸

COLIN

Did you at least put the soup on? Quit foolin' around! It's high time for dinin'!

LEXIE

Why it certainly is, sir! So perhaps, o' great provider, you'd be so kind as to show me the goddamn meat you brought home. You know: with all the money you made today. Got any on you?

COLIN

Jeez Louise, I thought there was still some left.

LEXIE

Did you now?

COLIN

I certainly did.

LEXIE

Really? While you were out doing God knows. . . . Oh fuck you! Choke on your damn dinner! I wish you were dead! Goddamn son of a bitch, crazy-ass fucker! You can go straight to hell!

JUDE, *hidden*

Good God Almighty! Point-counterpoint again! Talk about your duelin' banshees! And *Kyrie eleison* to you too, sister!
Pssst! Hey, Colin! Isn't it time for the congregation to respond?
What's the matter? Pussycat got your tongue?

LEXIE

Some fine Lord o' the Manor you are! I mean, seriously: Mister Wino's hangin' out in the bars since the crack o' dawn spendin' every cent we got! And what about these poor little babies? And me stuck here with 'em all day, all of us dyin' o' hunger and thirst around here. You practically got us on bread and water!

COLIN

Jesus H. Christ, that's just not true.

LEXIE

Oh yeah? Well I'll be goddamned if I got even half the bread I need!

COLIN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You'll get me and my little dog too! Jesus H. Christ, that's just not true.

LEXIE

[*With an exaggerated curtsy*] Begging your pardon, *Monsieur*, but if my lord Colin. . . .

JUDE, *hiding*

Ouf! She's just gettin' warmed up! After the *Sanctus* comes the *Agnus Dei* . . . and then . . . *Deo*! Day-o! Daylight come and man wan' go home!®

COLIN

[*Gesturing toward the children*] I wish to hell I'd never hooked up with the likes o' you!

LEXIE

Amen to that, pal. [*With an obscene gesture*] For all the good hookin' up with your sorry ass ever did me!

[JUDE

Talk about your divine harmony.]

COLIN

And she don't miss a beat. Charming.³⁹ What else you got, Lex?

LEXIE

Nasty prick! You shoulda just found yourself a whore!

Weeping. [Plorando]

Not a woman of good repute.

COLIN

Jesus H. Christ. You can't even put food on the table. This ain't worth a hill o' beans. And speakin' o' beans, where's my goddamn soup?

LEXIE

I'm worth more than your whole family tree, you damn hillbilly! [*She starts to hyperventilate with rage.*]

COLIN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Take a breath, wouldya?

Or blow it out your ass.

LEXIE

You wanna say that again to my face? God damn it! Nobody from *my* family ever pulled the kinda. . . .

COLIN

What?

LEXIE

[*More and more shrill*] Crap your sister Billie pulled.

COLIN

Jesus H. Christ almighty. You fucking bitch!

[JUDE]

Glory hallelujah, and cock-a-doodle-doo!⁴⁰

COLIN

Better say your prayers, you damn cunt, because I'm gonna kill you!⁴¹

LEXIE

You know what, dick brain? I swear to Christ: you lay a finger on me and I'll rip your face off. I give you fair warning!

He beats her.

[JUDE]

Oh my God, you'll be sorry!⁴²

LEXIE

What the fuck are you tryin' to do to me?

COLIN

Jesus H. Christ! I'm trying to shut you the hell up, *Madame*. We'll soon see who calls the shots around here!

LEXIE

You don't say? Who'da thunk it?

COLIN

Go on, keep it up. Get it out of your system.
[*Sotto voce to Jude*] Always the same old song.

LEXIE

Maybe I will.

COLIN

Step right up, folks! Hurry, hurry, hurry! Greatest freak show on earth! In what universe, pray tell, would *I* obey *you*? You got it ass-backwards, bitch.

LEXIE

Blow me! You can barely keep your end up around here. If *that*.⁴³ I bet if you'da married some slut, you'd be treatin' *her* right! You'd love her a hundred times more than you do me!

COLIN

Could be.

LEXIE

Oh yeah? Well I'll raise my right hand and swear on a stack o' Bibles right now that you never seen none o' them pretty boys hangin' 'round my door, all out for a good time, hittin' on me. Nobody sittin' in *my* pew. Unlike some.

COLIN

Oh for God's sake, shut up! I know very well why not. They're not in the market for an old cow. You're too damn ugly.

LEXIE

Fuck you! It's from puttin' up with you.

COLIN

[*Looking her over*] Yup. Not even to take to a dogfight.⁴⁴ You're too damn ugly.

LEXIE

Fuck you!

COLIN

A man would have to be out of his mind to try to parlay his way into you. You're too damn ugly.

LEXIE

Fuck you! It's from puttin' up with you.

[*Histrionically*] Alas and alack! Cursèd be the hour that you took me to wife! O unhappy day! [{*To the audience*} What the fuck are *you* lookin' at? I'm *acting*!]

Did I look like this back then?

COLIN

Not really. You were kinda pretty.

LEXIE

So who was it made me so unsightly, do you think?

COLIN

It's that you're rotten to the core. You're bad. You're bad, I know it.®

You're where beauty goes to die. And that, I'll have you know, is why poets always say "sweet and kind." You never hear "*bad* and kind." And *you*: you're just the bad kind! And you sure ain't wicked beautiful.

[{*To the audience*} What? You want another example? You never hear people say: "That woman is bitchy and amazing." It even *sounds* better if you say "she's *lovely* and amazing."]

And you, bitch, are neither lovely nor amazing.

LEXIE

Really? So what the fuck am I?

COLIN

Rebellious, unpleasant, and impolite.

LEXIE

I'm plenty pleasant enough for the likes o'. . . You're not exactly a fuckin' saint, you know.

[*She speaks to the audience, shaking her booty in their direction, which also happens to be in Jude's direction.*] Like *that* thing's gonna light *my* candle.® [What? I should let it go to waste?]

[JUDE

Lord have mercy! No, ma'am! A booty like that? Would be a darn shame!]⁴⁵

COLIN

Like I'd touch *that* piece of ass with a ten-foot pole!

[*Sotto voce to Jude*] Just look how that thing's put together!

LEXIE

And you know all about it, don'tcha, Mr. Limp-Dick?⁴⁶ [Couldn't find your balls with two hands and a flashlight. Come to think of it, couldn't find a flashlight either.] You got no idea when you got a good thing.

COLIN

Good God, woman! Nobody's talkin' to you! And, by the way, fuck you!

[*He takes Lexie's face in his hands.*] That's right. As God is my witness: you're the creature I love most in this whole wide world.

She takes his face [in her hands], and says:

LEXIE

Go fuck yourself.

[*She begins to kick and scratch and pummel.*]

[JUDE]⁴⁷

Whoa, Nelly! Watch the eyes! I do believe she's gonna scratch 'em out!

[*With a strong arm, Colin keeps Lexie at bay and at a safer distance.*]

COLIN

Yoo-hoo, baby doll, sweet little wife o' mine, so pretty, so kind . . . with a body built to light any man's candle.[®] [What a beautiful pussy you are, you are!] I just love you to death.

LEXIE

I'll rip your eyes right outta your face, you nasty, goddamn, fuckin' prick!

COLIN

Oh no you won't on accounta . . . Mary, Mother of God, I am . . . outta here! Exit, stage left! Bye-bye, now, Lex. And away I go!

LEXIE

And you can *go* straight to hell!⁴⁸ And rot! Blow me!

COLIN

[He speaks sotto voce to the audience and to Jude, who is slow to figure out that it's time to go.]

She's a real charmer, right?

[More loudly] Bye-bye, now, Lex, and away I go!

LEXIE

And you can *go* straight to hell!

COLIN

[To the audience] Pity the fool who gets married, right? Bye-bye now, Lex, and away I go!

LEXIE

And you can *go* straight to hell!

[There ensues a little game of tag, the better to facilitate Jude's rushed exit.]

COLIN

I know. And rot! Blow me yourself, bitch, and dang me! They oughta take a rope and hang me![©]

[Scene 5]

JUDE

Amen, brother! Hey, Colin, wait up! Don't forget your penance!
How's about a couple o' Hail Marys?

COLIN

Damn! If I hadn'ta beaten a hasty retreat, she woulda whupped my ass!
So, what do you think? What do you say now? Ever seen anything like
it?

JUDE

Hell, no!

COLIN

Hey Jude:® I don't know what to do.⁴⁹

JUDE

Hang in there.

COLIN

Till I die? Hey Jude!®
I'll hang to death by hangin' in!

JUDE

Your wife is hangin' in with you!
Hang in there.

COLIN

Till I die? Hey Jude!®
Can't grin and bear it. She's a shrew.

JUDE

Hang in, I say! Bear it and grin!
Hang in there.

COLIN

Till I die? Hey Jude!®
I'll hang to death by hangin' in!

JUDE

Speaking of which, I think we've been hanging around here long enough! You've gotta come hear mine now. You'll have to hide, of course, like I did.

COLIN

Not to worry. I've got this.

JUDE

I'll get a head start.

[Scene 6]

[At the home of Jude and Jean, a wood fire is burning at the hearth.]

JUDE

Yo! Hello!

JEAN

Hark! Could that be the sound of the master's voice? Peek-a-boo!
Who's there?

JUDE

It's me.

JEAN

Is it really you, my darling?

JUDE

In the flesh. *[Inspecting himself]* It's either me or someone who looks an awful lot like me! So . . . what do you think, pussycat? Could this be what you're looking for?

[Throughout this scene, rife with obscene gestures and sexual double entendres, Jude will talk a good game but will prove to be more interested in food and drink than in his wife's advances.]

JEAN

How's about I let you know after a little kiss? And maybe after that I'll fuck you.

JUDE

Whatever you say, dear. I'm all yours.
He kisses his wife.

COLIN *[from his hiding place]*

What in the name of all that's holy? This is amazing! Ever seen anything so adorable in your life? I ask you: Are they cute or what? Suckin' face like two cats in heat!

JEAN

How's about the two of us do a little number? Pretty please?

JUDE

Sure thing. That's a fine idea. And-a-one, and-a-two,
and-a-one-two-three:
*They sing [with Jean perhaps engaging in some dirty dancing].*⁵⁰

JEAN

I don't know about you darling, but I've worked up quite an appetite.
What do you say to a little nibble?

JUDE

[He eyes the roast partridge on the table.] I couldn't have said it better myself, sweetie pie. Unless you want to do an encore.

JEAN

Come on and see what mama's got for you right here. Watch the birdie now.

[He continues to eye the partridge.]

Oh. That's roast partridge.

JUDE

I don't care if it's a partridge in a pear tree. Fork it over.⁵¹ Got any wine?
[*He proceeds to throw himself upon the food. Colin cranes his neck to see what's going on.*]

JEAN

[*Climbing on top of him*] Comin' right up. As long as you promise that you're. . .

[COLIN

{*To the audience*} Can you believe this? {*Colin sneezes.*}]⁵²

JEAN

What was that?
So, are you gonna do it or what?

JUDE

Sure thing, you bet. But first bring me some wine.

JEAN

You're on. [*She drinks suggestively, licking her lips and then licking his.*]
But what do you say I go first? Cheers! [*She might try to transfer her sip mouth-to-mouth, as it were.*]

JUDE

Here's lookin' at you, kid. How's everything tasting?

JEAN

[*Jumping on top of him*] Never had better.

JUDE

So how about some for me? Full-bodied, deep red, gorgeous bouquet. . .

JEAN

Jude, I'm waiting. . .

JUDE

[*Taking another sip*] Hmmmm . . . not bad. Where'd you get it?

JEAN

Not to worry. We don't owe one red cent. I paid cash.

JUDE

My goodness, Jean! How'd you get your hands on that kind of money?

JEAN

Goodness, big boy, had nothin' to do with it. [*She might guide his hand to the logical place where women hide cash.*] I've always got a little extra on me somewhere. Right about . . . here, praise the Lord!

JUDE

I take thee at thy word, pretty lady. How's about you come a little closer.

JEAN

Mother Mary! I thought you'd never ask! You finally gonna fuck me?⁵³

[*In response to Jean's advances, Jude becomes more and more aroused but also more and more nervous.*]

JUDE

You're on. God! We'll do it all night long!® Just the two of us.® You mark my words.

JEAN

I'm just afraid you're gonna leave me high and dry again. You're all talk and no action!

JUDE

You're crazy. Just pour me some more o' that wine.

JEAN

Fine! Comin' right up. Jeez, once you get an idea in your head. . . .
[*She finally serves him some more wine.*]

JUDE

A deal's a deal. And I'll be drinking to you, my dear. It's the least I can do. [*He stands up to raise his glass.*] Cheers!

JEAN

Merci beaucoup, I'm sure. [*She forces him back into his chair and climbs on top of him.*] But you'll drink just as well sitting down as you will standing up.

JUDE

Whatever you say.

JEAN

Here's lookin' at you, kid. But I might need something a little harder, don'tcha think?

JUDE

I think you might be right.

JEAN

Make a wish . . . then blow! I'm all warmed up and you look good enough to eat! [*The chair should fall over.*]

COLIN

[*Aside*] Ride 'em cowboy! Get right back on that horse!

[*Sotto voce*] Hey, Jude! You comin' or what?

JUDE

I'm coming!

[*Both Colin and Jean think that he is answering them about "coming." Colin sneaks out from his hiding place.*]

Be right with you! But first, a little pick-me-up. Another nine or ten shots oughta do it. Just keep your pants on.

[*Jude attempts to extricate himself.*]

JEAN

[*Blocking him with her body*] Just where do you think you're going? I'll have you know you're in to stay.

[*Colin now makes his presence known.*]

JUDE

You'll have me back again in no time, darling. Cross my heart and hope to die!

JEAN

Back my ass! O Lord, why have you forsaken me!

[*She finally notices Colin.*] What's *he* doing here?

Weeping. [Plorando]

JUDE

What's all this? Silly, girl! There's no need to cry. Such a fuss! I'll be back before you know it.

[*Jude hesitates but, at Colin's urging, the two men leave the weeping Jean behind as Jude looks back.*]

*Speaking to [Colin]*⁵⁴ Dude. You have no idea.

COLIN

How's that?

JUDE

She's crying.

COLIN

Is not.

JUDE

Is too, I swear!

[Scene 7]

[*Outside the house*]

COLIN

Holy filet of fuck! That's a helluva gal you got there! God damn! I'd sell my soul to the Devil if I had me a piece of ass like that!⁵⁵ I don't care if she *is* hot to trot!

JUDE

But what if my wife were doin' it with somebody else?

COLIN

Ante up, chump. Of course, she's doin' it. Dude. You're a cuckold. Duh.

JUDE

No way! I don't believe a word of it. You lie!

COLIN

Jesus H. Christ! You, sir, are a cuckold! I'd stake my life on it! Yours too.

JUDE

Well, I certainly wouldn't take kindly to her doing it.

COLIN

I'll lay you odds right now. So ante up. Of course, she's doin' it. Duh.

JUDE

I don't believe a word of it. And even if it were true, I'm still a thousand times better off than you.

COLIN

I reckon you're gonna have to show me. [{*To the audience*} You know, I think he still doesn't get it! One more time?]

[*Doubled version of a new poetic set piece begins here.*]

Dude. You're a cuckold. Stupid clown!
You care to put some money down?
She's doin' it.

JUDE

Is not! No way!

COLIN

Open your eyes! She's goin' down.
A cuckold! Christ! It's plain as day.

JUDE

She'd turn my whole word upside down
By doin' it?

COLIN

It's great odds! Hey:
You care to put some money down?
She's doin' it.

JUDE

Is not! No way!
And even if it's true, I say
I'm better off than you, pal! Wow.
It's true.

COLIN

Not till you show me how!

[Doubled version ends here.]

JUDE

For one thing, your wife is bossy, bitchy, haughty, and proud.

COLIN

Yeah? Well yours is a hot-to-trot piece of ass. Pussycat got you
pussy-whipped.

JUDE

And yours is a hothead. There's good head and there's head case.

COLIN

Yeah, but at least she's of sound mind and body. At least she knows how to keep her legs closed. You can't put the Jeannie back in the bottle.

JUDE

You'll have nothing but trouble, pain, and suffering. Go on, waste your life away, a man of constant sorrow.[©] But I'll have you know the male animal has needs. He needs release.

So what if my wife sneaks around? Loans out the equipment to a guy or two? Who cares? All I can say is I'm still getting way more than my fair share. Besides, it's a great way to familiarize yourself with her gear, see how she rides. [Gallop, canter, ride like the wind.[©]] Hot to trot, I tell you. It's how women communicate. When they want to see which way the wind's blowing, they stick their asses in the air. Bottom line: that's just their way of having social intercourse. It's all about the derrière.

COLIN

I hear you. But rider on that wind? [Mine's] rotten to the core. The filthiest, dirtiest creature on the face o' the earth. She don't even do her hair!

JUDE

And I say only a woman of the world keeps herself clean and pretty! You want to know why? She takes the trouble to keep herself spic and span. Use it or lose it. I'll grant you: it's not ideal; but even a natural-born fool knows that a wife who's clean as a whistle down there is cause for celebration. He oughta be in ecstasy. Am I right or am I right?

COLIN

You can say that again!

[Doubled version of another poetic set piece begins here.]

JUDE

[Okay, I will!]
She'll torture you until you're dead!
Go on and waste your life in pain!
A man has needs, you knucklehead!
He needs release or goes insane.
No reason my wife should abstain
From mounting cowboys. Friend, I swear:
So what? Who cares? It's all the same.
I still get more than my fair share.
Besides, that's how you learn, *compère*,
'Bout how to mount your wife down there.
That's how a woman works, laid bare.
Just flip 'er over on her ass!

COLIN

That bitch! That cunt. You're right, I think
Mine's filthy, dirty, gross inside
Unkempt, unclean, and—dude—she *stinks!*
The grossest ever, far and wide.

JUDE

You *want* one who knows how to ride
'Cause they know how to keep things clean.
How come? Once men jump on, astride,
Them pipes get snaked. Know what I mean?
At first, I freaked: it seemed obscene.
But dude: you can't be so uptight!
When everything down there's pristine
Just party on! Her pussy's tight!
Get it?

[*Doubled version ends here.*]

COLIN

Talk about your flawless logic! So, now that I've heard your whole case,
I'm about ready to deliver the final verdict. [All good things must come
to an end.]

[Both men might fart before delivering the "bottom line."]

JUDE

And so it is for our tale of the tail. So, sing it with me now, folks: yes, in the end, this too shall pass.]

COLIN

You're better off if she's a piece of ass:
A party girl beats out the chick with class
'Cause even when she sneaks from bed to bed,
The chaste and prissy one just butts your head.
So pick the slut and do without the sass.

JUDE

Forget the good girl. One pain in the ass!
Put up with 'er and, dude, your ass is grass!
You might as well drop dead.

COLIN

That's what I said.
You're better off if she's a piece of ass:
A party girl beats out the chick with class.
That's even when she sneaks from bed to bed.
The reason is: the bitch that's kinda crass
Knows how to treat you right, she won't harass
You till you drop. She'll party on instead.
A bitch is either dead or in your bed.
That's just the way it is!

JUDE

The end. At last!
You're better off if she's a piece of ass:
A party girl beats out the chick with class,
That's even when she sneaks from bed to bed.
The chaste and prissy one just butts your head.
So pick the slut and do without the sass.

COLIN [*as the Company starts to pass the hat*]

Don't get up yet, folks. Not so fast!

We're gonna do a song for you.

It's only right. Look! Here's the cast.

We'll sing a song to say adieu!⁵⁶

[*Possible closing production number*]⁵⁷

Here ends the farce of the two husbands and their two wives.

Published in Lyon,
at the house of the late Barnabé Chaussard
near the Church of Our Lady of Solace.

9.

Wife Swap: A Musical Comedy, or,

The Taming, Pas de Deux

Le Savatier, Marguet, Jacquet, Proserpine et l'Oste

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BLOTTO, the COBBLER (Le Savatier)

MARGIE, Blotto's Wife (Marguet)

JACKO (Jacquet)

PERSEPHONE, Jacko's Wife (Proserpine)

The INNKEEPER (L'Oste)

[Multiple Extras at the bar]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce joyeuse à V personnages, c'est [as]çavoir: le Savatier, Marguet, Jacquet, Proserpine et l'Oste* is the final play (#74) of the *Recueil La Vallière*. It appears in one published edition only: as the fourteenth play in vol. 4 of Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, *RFMSJ* (again, cited here by volume and page number only). Petit de Julleville provides a helpful plot summary in *RTC*, #189 (233–34), as does Faivre in *Répertoire*, #157 (400–401). This anonymous farce is 302 octosyllabic verses for Petit de Julleville and 307 for Faivre. To my knowledge, there is no modern French or English translation and, when you read the next section, you'll understand why others shied away.

Plot

Before there was reality TV, there was the medieval “reality theater.” In a way, its coming was foretold to us by #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*. *Wife Swap* inaugurates our final group of four plays, all hopelessly devoted to spouse-swapping.

'Tis the tale of two and, eventually, four couples. 'Tis a *Taming of the Shrew* times two or, more accurately, a medieval *Kiss Me, Kate*. Here is the setup (for which our categories of plot, character, and staging are intertwined to the point of being inseparable):

In one corner: an unnamed, cheeky, and militaristically dictatorial cobbler and his obliging but boring wife, Marguet. They shall be "Blotto," a stock name for this drunken character, and "Margie" (in part, to avoid comparisons with Maggie of #4, *For the Birds*). In the other corner: Blotto's weak, pusillanimous best friend, Jacko (Jacquet), profession unknown—who, at first, sounds a lot like Colin from our previous play. He too is married to a volatile, aggressive, and foul-mouthed woman, this one called Persephone (Proserpine). At Blotto's place, the cobbler seems to have pretty much everything but money; at Jacko's, where insults, expletives, and imprecations fly, everything is going to hell in a handbasket. The play opens with a male gossip session in which the gents compare marital notes about head butting and ass kicking, almost as if they have just seen a performance of *Bitches and Pussycats*. Blotto and Jacko do more than discuss a woman's need to vent her head of steam. They're prepared to put their money where Persephone's mouth is and—swing your partner!—swap wives. But not before all four parties consent. And they're off.

Jacko trades in the unruly Persephone for Blotto's docile Margie; and Blotto is all too happy to teach Jacko's bitch a lesson or two—remember #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*?—about corporeal subjugation. (In fact, the whole swap is *Blotto's* idea.) The taming of Persephone-the-shrew next entails a zany vaudeville in which music is, once again, the essence of farcical communication. Any wife who gives her husband a song and dance will be forced to sing and dance; and, for better or for worse, when Persephone farts in Scene 5, her music literally stinks. As she is whipped into line, her "reeducation" is *mise en scène* as dinner theater or, as Petit de Julleville put it, as a cabaret (*RTC*, 234).¹ But, if life is a cabaret, old chum,[®] complete with a Joel Grey-like emcee in the role of the Innkeeper, it's a violent cabaret, more along the lines of an Abbot and Costello routine. After quite the barroom brawl (or catfight), we learn that those who sing and play together stay together. In an exhortative envoi, Blotto steps forward with the moral of the story: a shrew should never be given in marriage to a jackoff (or Jacko), whereas a bitchy goddess can be hobbled only by a cobbler who gives it his awl. But who leaves with whom at the end of the play? Are both wives restored to their lawfully wedded husbands, with Persephone presumably in better working order? Or has the swap become permanent? That's where the fun—and the difficulty—begins.

As early as the moment in which everyone signs off on the switcheroo, we can only wonder why and wheretofore. One can readily fathom why the beleaguered Jacko might jump at the chance to dump the vituperative Persephone and why Persephone might have had it up to here with her wimpy milquetoast of a husband. But at least Persephone has the upper hand: with her endless bill of particulars, she even manages to make the bossy wife of *The Washtub* look like a pussycat (*FCMF*, 144–46). More perplexing still: What's in it for Blotto? Since Persephone's excessive rage is known to all—even sweet little Margie is scared to death of her—why in the world would Blotto exchange a pussycat for a bitch?² On one hand, farcical cobblers tend to singularly incompetent; thus, Blotto's willingness to ditch a perfectly amiable wife could belie the stereotypical stupidity. On the other hand, this Blotto is no dummy. It turns out that he is singularly competent at shrew taming; and how a relatively lowly, unsuccessful craftsman came by that uncommon talent is a mystery. Proclaiming himself the winner of *Wife Swap*, Blotto basks in his fifteen minutes of fame during the closing envoi in which Petit de Julleville sees a precursor to the closing advice of Molière's *School for Wives* (*RTC*, 234) and Faivre, a maxim that sex is the root of every happy marriage (*Répertoire*, 401). Ultimately, Blotto's victory seems to have something to do with marriage being based on like belonging with like, a point about which I agree with Faivre (401). In contradistinction to the ersatz wisdom of *Bitches and Pussycats*, two halves—two of a kind—really *can* make one whole. The party's over; it's time to call it a farce.⁶

But, again, who wins? And who leaves with whom? In a choreographed push-me–pull-you, the final spouse grab is so dramatic that Persephone is almost drawn and quartered. But are the husbands and wives battling it out to return to their lawfully wedded spouses? Or do they wish to retain no-longer-temporary new ones? In the denouement of Scene 5, I hear the beat—and the beating—of a different drummer who is audible only in performance. This necessitates an out-of-order explanation of sets and staging because the plot cannot be understood without it.

Here's the thing: the dialogue of the culminating fracas is so sparse, so minimalist, so absurd and absurdist, so open-ended and transmutable by pantomime that it is virtually impossible to decipher what transpires. It is even possible that whoever transcribed the play got as confused as I did about who was speaking, leading to the misattribution of one or more lines (although it does bear mention that, in *RFMSJ*, the corresponding *RLV* text [fols. 412v–413r] has been transcribed largely correctly). The rapid-fire exchanges along

the lines of “Mine!” “No, mine!” (*RFMSJ*, 4: 23) leave much room for interpretation in a play of surprising psychological complexity. Who is fighting for (and against) whom? At this point, I’ll cut to the chase with how I’ve resolved the unresolvable:

I’ve *un*resolved it.

Exceptionally for this play, I have provided two endings, thoroughly different one from the other, both justified by the text. Actually, make that three endings. No, four. No, five. No . . . you’ll see. There is an “Ending A” for the new marital order and an “Ending B” for the old one, both with several interchangeable variations—and at least one more ending besides, which I’ve not proposed, if the Innkeeper is brought in to serve as referee. The gist is that Ending A stages a primarily Blotto-led fight for Persephone, which unlocks the state of unholy deadlock by locking in new partnerships guaranteeing that everybody wins for losing. Ending B results in the same old, same old; everybody loses for winning and lives happily unhappily—unhappily happily?—ever after. But only staging will tell us whether this is the purportedly standard farcical reversion to the status quo or whether some truly original reconception of the formula has broken the mold. I should really have called these Production Notes “Director’s Notes”: I finally realized that what I’m presenting here is a virtual workshop of how to direct that play.

In my translation of the climactic denouement at the bar (Scene 5), I’ve opted for scripting the changeover as permanent. I believe Ending A to be the reading most consistent with a highly inconsistent text: it resolves *most*, if not *all*, of the inconsistencies of action, character, language, and staging. Nevertheless, several decisive lines (4: 23–24) tend to favor the unforegrounded, nonverisimilar, *diabolus ex machina* Ending B, which reverses the play’s *raison d’être*. In Ending B, notwithstanding the painstaking exposition of two new and more compatible couples, everyone suddenly, illogically, and unexpectedly cleaves anew to his or her *original* spouse. Do you remember the king’s page who arrives at the end of Molière’s *Tartuffe* to herald royal opposition to all forms of religious casuistry? Do you remember that his appearance overturns the very ending for which the play had been begging? That, I think, is analogous to what might have happened in *Wife Swap*.

The bottom line is that, no matter which ending we choose, there is much that doesn’t make sense. Is Blotto truly wily or not wily enough? If he is triumphant in Ending A, and if all the characters’ speeches have been attributed correctly—a big *if* (see note 56)—then why is he so pissed off at Jacko? And, if Blotto pridefully proclaims victory in the envoi, then *which* victory is it:

to have won a more suitable wife in Persephone, or to have fixed everything, such that the original, deadlocked state of holy wedlock is reestablished? And, if the latter, why in the name of Hades would Blotto, the instigator of the proceedings, be pleased about *that*? By the same token, if Jacko succeeds in tricking Blotto (Ending B), then how on earth could such a feeble man have so abruptly grown enough of a pair to outsmart his more clever and infinitely more macho friend? While there is some proof that Jacko blows his stack at the end of Scene 2, Ending B strains credibility. It's patently absurd. And there's the rub: so is Ending A. Farce is nothing if not patently absurd. So the question is: *How* absurd?

Stick with me: it's about to get incredibly complicated. And do be advised that, for the sake of much-needed clarity, my stage directions will be as numerous and overdetermined as the final brawl is over-the-top and underdetermined. Here goes:

There seems little doubt that Jacko and Blotto are engaged in hand-to-hand combat for the retrained Persephone, whereas poor, lovely Margie is odd woman out. But whatever for? Is it that, as for Jude in #8, *Bitches and Pussycats* and—coming up—Marcel and Julian in #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, a happy, sated life of sex is a drag (and not a drag show)? Is this the flip side of contemporary “assiomatic” wisdom à la *Cosmo* girl, according to which you can keep your man only if you satiate his bottom line in the sack? And what about what the women want? Do Margie and Persephone prefer the easier-to-dominate Jacko or the drunken Blotto of the iron fist? Either misogynistic spin would be typical of farce, which delights in staging women as both abusers and abused, all the while casting both proclivities as female shortcomings. In this case, though, odd-man-out Jacko would go perfectly with odd woman out Margie. Likewise, Blotto and Persephone are alike enough to make for a harmonious couple. Like would thus mate with like, which makes for a happy—or happyish—ending that is most irregular for farce.

If other farces are any model, the normal comedic circumstances would dictate that the original marital couples be reinstated as everybody loses—except that Jacko would stay with the allegedly new and improved Persephone. Indeed, that conclusion is in line with that of our next three plays in which, sadder but wiser, everyone lives unhappily ever after. It is also in line with Alan Knight's contention that farces tend to wrap with a return to the status quo (*Aspects of Genre*, 50–53). But that doesn't quite cut it for *Wife Swap*. For one thing, if Persephone is profoundly altered, then there is no status quo

but a new normal. Final answer? Whether I'm right or wrong about an A versus B ending, I'm not wrong that performance can—and should—change everything. The fight choreography of Scene 5 has the potential to undercut any given understanding of who wishes to abide with whom. Although your innumerate translator is butting her head against the mathematics of the variables as much as Johnno did in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*, think about it this way: with four characters in play, there are three possible pairings—Blotto with Margie (and Jacko with Persephone); Blotto with Persephone (and Jacko with Margie); and Margie with Persephone (and Blotto with Jacko). So I say, try them all!¹³ While I've contrived to capture this indeterminacy with a bit of stage business—a quick patty-cake game of “Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?”—nobody in *Wife Swap* is destined to remain a cookie-cutter character. And that goes for the actors too; so wait! there's more:

Perhaps the best way to conclude *Wife Swap* is to take advantage of the fascinating liminal space of the curtain call, when actors are no longer quite their characters but not yet quite themselves either (States, *Great Reckonings*, 197–206). Any one of the four characters might leave the stage with any man—or any woman—of his or her choosing. He or she might even choose “none of the above,” electing instead to exit by taking an audience member by the hand—or, as in episodes of TV's *Dr. Phil*, by taking the actor's own real-life spouse by the hand—and walking off into the sunset . . . until the next performance. Yet another possibility is for a company to follow the lead suggested by Ending A and *really* shake things up. It is not entirely far-fetched to have Blotto walk off with *both* women in a ménage à trois, leaving feckless Jacko the odd man out; or, better yet, to have Blotto and Jacko walk off *together*, a climax of their bromance in a triumphant gay marriage in which they are *outed* as the truly odd men *out*. In other words, when it comes to the antiquated business of taming shrews, modern readers and performers have newfangled tools at their disposal by which they can choose to tame the *show*, updating our response to the play's misogyny with a resounding, “Shrew you!”

Characters and Character Development

Interestingly, three of *Wife Swap*'s cast could easily have stepped right out of *Monk-ey Business* (FF, #9). Both plays feature a wily Blotto the Cobbler, his shrewish wife, and an Innkeeper of questionable repute who is eager to get into the act. The main challenge of character in our play aligns with that

of the indecipherability of the action at the Good-Times Inn: it is unworkable to build the characters until you have figured out who is doing what to whom and why. You can't know the characters until you know what they do; and you can't know what they do until you know who they are—a theatrical catch-22 that aptly symbolizes holy deadlock.

When we first meet Blotto in Scene 1, he seems chipper enough, singing a variety of happy tunes as he works, albeit not very well—the working, that is: you can decide about the singing. Financially, he barely makes ends meet; and his failure as a provider may be related to his lack of skill and industry at his menial job. On the home front, familiarity appears to have bred contempt even for his lovely and solicitous wife, who seems to annoy him. So too does the prospect of sex, at least with her. So what is he so chipper about? Is Margie right to imply that there are other women for whom he's more up and ready? Hers is a reasonable observation in that Blotto's physique later proves sufficiently sexy to appeal to Persephone. When alone with Margie, however, he gives the impression of being simultaneously weary and terrified of sex, which he practices as an act of violence. Like Colin from #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*, he is a brute at heart and, with that remark, I contradict Faivre, who focuses on one of Blotto's last lines about "softening" Persephone (*amolyr* at 4: 25). Faivre thinks that Blotto is a pretty nice guy who, with gentle hand, "hits Persephone a grand total of *only* once" (*Répertoire*, 401). I think that one beating is one too many (below, § "Sets and Staging"). So is he passive-aggressive or just plain aggressive? He seethes even beneath the surface of the cheeriest musical numbers (whereas Persephone's rage is very much *on* the surface). And he is certainly snide enough to launch subtle barbs at his so-called best friend. Consequently, when applying the pseudo-medical wisdom about biological venting from *Bitches and Pussycats* to *Wife Swap*, we can anticipate that something is about to blow.

As for the pretty, charming, and selfless Margie, she and Blotto are in no way birds of a feather. If you are a senior citizen qualified to channel Gale Storm's televised series, *My Little Margie* (1952–55), then, by all means, do: the actress cast as Margie might sport a retro look. Or she might be conceived as a regular Stepford wife. Hot, sexy, and all over Blotto, Margie sings, she dances, and she's practically a porn star if that's what her temperamental husband wants her to be. And, there's her problem in a nut sack: he doesn't seem to *want* her to be much of anything; or, true to the cabaret scene, maybe he just likes to watch. Sexual frustration would be a viable approach to playing the often inscrutable Margie, who—most controversially for any modern *mise-en-scène*—seems to

be asking for sex at the very moments when she is being mistreated. She is the loneliest character of the four, denied the pleasure of affection from either a spouse or a female companion. In stark contrast to BFFs Lexie and Jean of #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*—or Jenny and Penny of #11, *Extreme Husband Make-over*, or Gilly and Françoise of #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*—there is no love lost between the two women of *Wife Swap*. As the men hang out for girl talk, the women actively dislike each other, with Margie rightly issuing some of the harshest assessments of the vitriolic Persephone. All that said, the actress—an update of the medieval actor—who brings Margie to life must decide whether the character is authentically kind or inauthentically putting on one fine act. Margie proves to be quite the talented singer and dancer; so she might well be a great impersonator too, thereby presenting a wonderful opportunity for a featured role by an audience favorite.

Meanwhile, over at Jacko's place, Persephone is a harsh, husband-beating harridan, a domineering woman, and dominatrix avant la lettre—until, that is, she goes head to head with Blotto. Belligerent and foulmouthed, she is constantly in attack mode, regularly fulminating against her husband. (In Middle French, she is scripted with numerous exclamations along the lines of “Ah!”; but I've salted her language in keeping with her ill temperament.) And let's not forget what a good Christian she is. Ostentatiously so. In fact, her religiosity is one of the few things that might explain the otherwise bizarre ease with which she capitulates to—and apparently enjoys—Blotto's violent techniques of indoctrination. Or does she? (below, § “Sets and Staging.”) Even if she has a penchant for martyrdom, is it really fair to say that, under Blotto's barbaric tutelage, Persephone is “liberated”? In Scene 5, pertinent onomatopoeic details suggest that, even when she displays sensational obedience in the sexual arena, she manages not so subtly to rebel, always two steps ahead of her keeper. But, in the end, she's damned if she does and damned if she doesn't, which harks back to the very origins of the character.

When Persephone submits to Blotto, she incarnates human duality—a grand farcical theme that will be clear as a bell in our Play #11. Recall that the mythical Persephone was the daughter of Demeter (Greek for “Mother-Earth”) and the unwilling bride of Hades. After her abduction and rape, Demeter was in despair during Persephone's six-month ordeal in hell, which wrought a long winter of discontent until Persephone's eventual liberation for the spring and summer. This natural cycle is embodied by our Persephone, who is merely hell on earth or, for the witty Faivre, “infernal” (*Répertoire*, 401).⁴ But in *Wife Swap*, she is *funny*. Physically, the actress might be pallid, waifish,

ghostly, as if retaining a memory of the underworld. She should also be drop-dead gorgeous, hot as Hades, as it were. And she's going down. Persephone symbolizes the split of that natural cycle of life, in which half a year's wintry despair eternally gives way to another half of warm fertility, a motif entirely consistent with a play that ponders marriage as halves, doubles, and periodicity as it rags on women. It's the time of the season for swapping.

Needless to say, poor, frustrated Jacko has his hands full. And not in a good way. He hasn't a clue as to how to deal with a hotheaded woman at home; he is the quintessential henpecked husband, a weakling, and his impotence is getting him down. Appearance-wise, it could be very funny to stage him with an enormous codpiece that would caricaturize precisely where he comes up short. True, when push comes to shove, he is capable of venting right back at Persephone (Scene 2); but his marital woes have made him a regular at the Good-Times Inn. Unsurprisingly, Jacko is quick on the trigger to swap out his wife, all the more so in that he seems genuinely enamored of Margie, with whom he can be downright gallant. Even during the subjugation scenes, he is ill-equipped for fucking anyone over; and the extent of his marching orders to Blotto's wife is to command her to laugh. Then again, depending on the exact meaning of "two more hits" (*Encore deulx coups* [4: 20]), actors will need to decide whether Jacko whacks Margie on the ass and, if so, whether this act is violent or playful. And yet, if things were going so well with Margie, then, at the final stroke of the brawl, why on earth would Jacko go to the mattresses to get Persephone back? Can farce really be intimating that men enjoy abuse too? Can the genre be as misanthropic and misandrous as it is misogynistic? Any apparent inconsistencies of character can be resolved by teasing out the tragic dimensions of the story, swapping out comedy for the tale of a troubled, virtually unemployed, alcoholic, submissive to his wife's dom.

The Innkeeper at the Good-Times Inn (*L'Oste Joyeux*) obviously prefers his female patrons, just as he prefers not to give his male customers the time of day. (Any number of surly servers serve up inspiration. Try translating *en anglais* Eddie Izzard's obnoxious *hôtelier*, played *en français* in *Dress to Kill*: "Do you have a room?" "Of course we have a room, this is a hotel!") For his duties, which are comparable to those of his *confrère*, the Gatekeeper in *Monk-ey Business* (FF, #9), he has his finger in many pots: receiving guests, serving drinks, preparing food, and waiting tables. Since Persephone seems attracted to him, the Innkeeper should be sexy as well as sassy. As I hinted above (§ "Plot"), he might, à la Willy in #2, *The Shithouse*, serve as referee of the melee at the cabaret.

Language

Linguistically speaking, *Wife Swap* revels in music and in onomatopoeia. We see and hear Blotto and Margie laughing (*Ha! ha! ha!* [4: 6]); *Ha! ha! he! he! ha!*; and *Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!* [4: 20]); along with Blotto's pleasure at the sounds of violence (*Hict! Hict! Heust! Heust* [4: 11]). We see, hear, and maybe smell a fart (*Pouf! pouf! pouf! pouf! pouf!* [4: 19]); and I believe that we even hear an orgasm (*A!* [4: 4–5]), as in “ooh,” “ah,” and “ooh-la-la!” It's all part and parcel of instilling in Persephone the sounds of silence. Wordplay on *tacere* (which yields the French *taire*) brilliantly captures a collective desire that Persephone “shut up” (*garder bien le tacelet* [4: 7]). Furthermore, the term is musicological, as in ♫: everybody wants the shrew to “give it a rest.”

Noteworthy too: in the midst of a donnybrook, Jacko and Persephone tend to switch from *vous* to the intimate *tu* for their most vile insults. They have a special fondness for imprecations with horses and insects. For his own part, bossy Blotto is partial to a bellicosely militaristic subtext. And, for either couple, it is all too easy to comprehend the poetic pairing (4: 5) of “husband” (*mary*) with being “sorry” or “regretful” (*mary*). Be it Jacko or Blotto, we're talking about one sorry husband.

Last, one of the key lines of the play is uttered at some point by all four spouses in a variety of contexts but, crucially, when they each consent individually to the swap. Jacko and Blotto (4: 15), followed by Persephone and Margie (4: 16) all say: *je le veux*. Not only does that mean “fine,” “with pleasure,” or “that's what I want”: it is also the language of accepting a wager: “you're on,” “I'm in,” and the like.

Sets and Staging

Three sets are needed for this musical comedy, the first two representing the interiors of the couples' respective homes. These are meant to be situated nearby one another; and both must be visible at all times. The all-important third set is that of the Good-Times Inn, an establishment whose “good times” are perhaps to be had in rooms rented by the hour. The Inn should be center stage and, logistically, the action calls for it to be in closer proximity to Blotto's place than to Jacko's—making it easier for Blotto to get “blotto.”⁵ Depending on the sensibilities of the production, the Inn might be depicted as exceptionally seedy, exceptionally upscale (imagine the production numbers of *Victor/Victoria*), or somewhere in between. Think high camp. Think

the best or the worst of “dinner theater.” Above all, remember that female roles were normally played by men and think medieval drag show.

Wife Swap is a bona fide musical whose characters are always bursting into song and dance. Blotto, for instance, voices a running request that one woman or the other do a little number for him. Indeed, the play boasts multiple call-outs for specific popular songs; even when these are no longer extant, they were clearly recognizable by representative lines or phrases only.⁶ Additionally, in a treasure trove for dance historians, it specifies such medieval dances as *le branlle des Amoureux* and *le Trihory de Bretaigne* [4: 8].⁷

That’s the *where*. As for the *when*, the text indicates that the action takes place at *déjeuner*, the midday “dinner.” Nighttime, however, is the right time[®] for a contemporary cabaret, where overblown production numbers are the order of the day. And *Wife Swap* features plenty of those: mime, break dancing, square dancing, posing, voguing, laughing, crying, drinking, smoking, farting, gaming, and lots of sex—or, says Faivre, the Kama Sutra (*Répertoire*, 401). The tougher dramaturgical issue concerns the play’s violence; and, as I have advised in both “*The Farce of the Fart*” and *Other Ribaldries* and in some of the preceding plays of this volume, hyperreality proves an effective performance strategy. In the twenty-first century, it is nearly impossible to stage as comedy the vicious blows to Persephone’s body and face. And it *should* be. But that is not to say that it is flat-out impossible to make light of it for purposes of greater insight, as anyone familiar with Bill Maher’s comical denunciation of “wife-beater” shirts can readily attest.⁸ As noted above (“Introduction”), when savagery is transformed into an artistic parody of itself, violence is contextualized as much as it is decontextualized (*MTOC*, 6–9). Ironically and counterintuitively, violence can render the action both more real and more *unreal*. Thus, I tend to redouble my translations of the play’s doubling motifs by scripting the manhandling as both comic *and* tragic, one after the other.

A complicated but much less vexed dramaturgical issue concerns the exact location of the vaudevillian taming of the shrew: Do the events unfold in public or in private (as if the latter term were possible at the theater)? Since the Inn is in the neighborhood, do Blotto and Jacko take the ladies home for a time (as Jacko suggests [4: 16])? Do they transport them to the sort of wooded area that served as the site for musical rapes like “Ich was ein chint so wolgetan” from the Carmina Burana as well as real-life medieval rapes?⁹ Do they try their new wives on for size while everybody is still at the Inn? While the text signals unambiguously the presence of a bed in the reeducation scenes—the two men order the two women to “lie down”—the comic hyperreality best

comes through if these scenes take place at the “Good-Times Inn,” where the floor-show helps to divert attention away from the unpaid bar tab. That set might feature a small stage or bandstand for nightly entertainment along with an inviting sofa or two strategically placed in intimate corners dedicated to the Inn’s titular “good times.” And, of course, folks can always “get a room.”

So do they or don’t they? Who exactly bears witness to each scene of wifely subjugation? Do those spectators include the two husbands? And what about after the taming? The degree of voyeurism and even pornography will be determined by the director. If the men are swingers, one room will suffice for the two voyeurs, its fourth wall conveniently removed for the benefit of the equally voyeuristic spectators of *Wife Swap*, who might potentially be construed as next in line. The medieval version of clubbing? Speaking of which: at one juncture, when the trio of Blotto, Margie, and Jacko set out for dinner at the Good-Times at the end of Scene 3, a particularly jingle-like song almost seems to cue a bit of medieval product placement: advertising for what the preferred local drinking establishment had on tap. Talk about site specificity.

Finally, if all this is sounding really terrible to you, it needn’t. That sparse dialogue of the denouement and the paramountcy of mime (detailed at length above, § “Plot”), bestows a phenomenal opportunity upon any troupe or any translator for bringing out the female agency that the play gives the impression of snuffing out. Believe it or not, Persephone’s fart is the very essence of a possible feminist appropriation of some of the more disturbing messages of the play. Seriously, folks: that *Pouf! Pouf! Pouf! Pouf! Pouf!* (4: 19) constitutes one of the key “statements” of the play. When, at Blotto’s directive in Scene 5, Persephone cuts a mere five of the requisite seven farts, she flat out refuses obedience. This makes perfect sense from a woman whose personality would dictate that she tell him to “shove it up his ass.” Refusing to be dominated, she rebels against the moral of the story (which farce itself also tends to do); and thanks to staging, any lose-lose situation for women can metamorphose into: “Hey, boys, here’s what you gotta do to tame your shrew.” Persephone gets the “last word,” and it’s “Up yours!” So much for being the butt of a Basochial joke.

Costumes and Props

On display in the home of Blotto and Margie is a large variety of accoutrements for spinning, sewing, cobbler’s work, and whatever else is needed: a spinning wheel, knitting needles, crochet hooks for Margie and, for Blotto, a billiard cue or two, threads of many sizes, colors, and thickness, a work

bench, and an awl. At Jacko's place, Persephone's religious accessories are so much in evidence that they rise to the level of camp (or of the *marché* at Lourdes): rosaries, bibles, religious statues, books of hours, icons, velvet paintings of the Last Supper, etc.

The Good-Times Inn makes up for in quantity what it lacks in quality. It is well stocked with liquor, wine, swill, garnishes for cocktails, and vittles.

*Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)*¹⁰

"Money Makes the World Go Round." By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #2592542.

"The Best Things in Life Are Free." By Lew Brown, B. G. De Sylva, and Ray Henderson. ASCAP Work ID: 32004106.

"Maggie May." ["Wake Up, Maggie!"] By M. Quittentom and Roderick David Stewart. ASCAP Work ID: 430205477.

"Twist." By Hank Ballard. BMI Work #1561070.

"Shake Your Booty." By Harry Wayne Casey and Rick Finch. BMI Work #1318490.

"Shake, Baby, Shake." By William Jack Dupree. BMI Work #1318065.

"Respect." By Otis Redding. BMI Work #1244564.

"Let the Good Times Roll." By Shirley M. Goodman and Leonard Lee. ASCAP Work ID: 420028811.

"Whatever Lola Wants." Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. ASCAP Work ID: 530045862.

"I Know a Place." By Anthony Peter Hatch. BMI Work #631762.

"99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall." Anonymous.

"Magic to Do." By Stephen Lawrence Schwartz. ASCAP Work ID: 886449522.

"My Man." "Mon Homme" ["My Man"]. By Jacques Mardochée Charles, Albert Lucien Willemetz, and Maurice Yvain. ASCAP Work ID: 432736195.

"My Melancholy Baby." By Ernie Burnett and Robert Thygersen. ASCAP Work ID: 130065393.

"Jumping Jack Flash." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #780468.

"They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha Ha." By Jerry Samuels. ASCAP Work ID: 500221503.

“Hurts So Good.” By George Michael Green and John Mellencamp.
 ASCAP Work ID: 380233738.
 “I’ve Had the Time of My Life.” By John DeNicola, Donald Markowitz,
 and Franke Previte. ASCAP Work ID: 500394176.
 “Hush, Little Baby” [“Mockingbird” lullaby]. Traditional.
 “Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree.” By Marion Sinclair. ASCAP
 Work ID: 410175529, or, as “Kookaburra Song,” ASCAP Work
 ID: 410233466.¹¹
 “O No, John.” [“No, John, No!”] Traditional folk song.
 “The Girl Is Mine.” By William Adams, Keith Harris, and Michael Jackson.
 ASCAP Work ID: 371868552.
 “Cabaret.” By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #167242.
 “The Party’s Over.” By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne.
 ASCAP Work ID: 460012557.
 “Bye-Bye, Baby.” [“Bye, Bye, Baby (Baby Goodbye)”]. By Bob Crewe and
 Robert Gaudio. BMI Work #165170.
 “Let’s Stay Together.” By Al Green, Al Jackson Jr., and Willie Mitchell. BMI
 Work #859990.
 “Who’s Sorry Now.” By Bert Kalmar, Harry Ruby, and Ted Snyder. ASCAP
 Work ID: 530081448.
 “We Go Together.” By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP Work
 ID: 530175918.

[Possible opening music]

[Scene 1]

[The play opens at the home of Blotto and Margie. The Cobbler is having difficulty repairing a particularly challenging pair of shoes. Margie is spinning.]¹²

BLOTTO *opens with a song*

“When I was one and twenty
 And fine, I sought to marry. . . .”¹³
 Margie!

MARGIE

What's that, my worker bee?

BLOTTO

I need some of that thread right here!
A few more yards. Up! One, two, three!
Margie!

MARGIE

What's that, my worker bee?

BLOTTO

There's no more silk, I guarantee.

MARGIE

I have to spin it first, my dear.

BLOTTO

Margie!

MARGIE

What's that, my worker bee?

BLOTTO

I need some of that thread right here
A few more yards. Up! One, two, three!

[There is silence for a time as Blotto endeavors to work. He then sings.]

"I've got the itch: I've loved her seven years. . . ."

MARGIE

Praise the Lord! And just when I thought you'd fallen asleep at the switch. Coming right up. I did hear you the first time, you know.

BLOTTO

[To Margie and/or the audience] I don't know about you but I think I'm a pretty good guy. Working till dinnertime just to put food on the table.

MARGIE

Otherwise, you'd have to starve, dear, because we're all out of. . . .

BLOTTO

What?

MARGIE

Money.

BLOTTO

Our financial situation, Margaret, is none of your concern. Besides, money is the root of. . . .

MARGIE

What?

BLOTTO

All evil. [*As he gesticulates, he might become entangled in his thread.*]
Whenever I've got some, I get all tied up in knots. Gets me down.

MARGIE

Not me. I want some.

BLOTTO

Honest?

MARGIE

Cross my heart.

BLOTTO

I take thee at thy word. Call me but broke and I'll. . . .
I get it: [*Singing*]¹⁴ Money, money, money, money. Get a little, get a little. . . .[©]

MARGIE

[*Sidling up to him*] You know, darling, it's not like it would take a miracle to lift . . . your spirits.

BLOTTO

My spirits? In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy. . . . Sorry, Margie,¹⁵ but I need that thread. The heavyweight leather thread. And, while you're at it: I need butter and cheese by the pound. And wine and meat and shirts and jackets and Coats and Clarks. . . . I've got a household to feed, you know.

MARGIE

[*Sidling up to him again*] What I know is that the best things in life are free.[©] When you're lying in bed, all pale and soft: that doesn't cost one red cent, now, does it? What more could you ask, my darling?

BLOTTO

I can barely keep my eyes open here. This old shoe's gonna be the death o' me yet. Might as well be made o' steel.

[*Margie fears that she might be the "old shoe" in question but recovers quickly.*]

MARGIE

Poor thing. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you. Just name it and it's yours. [*She starts to climb on top of him.*]

BLOTTO

Take it easy, Margie! That tickles! Ha, ha, ha!¹⁶

MARGIE

Is that an awl in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?

BLOTTO

Ooooh-la-la!¹⁷ Now do a little number. Got a song or two for me?¹⁸

MARGIE

Me melody, you harmony, dear:
"My pussy's soft as silk, a honey pot.
A gift box wrapped up with a pretty bow
So step right up boys: show me what you got."

BLOTTO

“A billiard cue for pokin’s what I got
Used it and lost it. What a way to go!
I struck and stuck it while the iron was hot!”¹⁹

[Locating a cue stick—the more phallic, the better—that resembles a conductor’s baton, he requests more musical numbers.]

MARGIE

You must admit. . . . Pleasure is as pleasure does.

BLOTTO

What do you mean?

MARGIE

I mean finding a girlfriend.

BLOTTO

But I could never cheat on you, Margie.

MARGIE

Whoa, now!
[She falls briefly into reverie.]

BLOTTO

[Wake up, Margie, I think I got somethin’ to say to you!][®]
[Margie attempts more amorous advances.]
When I say sing, you sing! And when I say give it a rest, you give it a rest or, as God is my witness, I’ll slit your pretty little throat.²⁰

[He might put her in a chokehold, prolonging the musical “rest.”]

MARGIE

What’s gotten into you all of a sudden? I’d never give you a hard time.

BLOTTO

Darn tootin’! You’d have to get by me first.

MARGIE

Yeah, baby!

BLOTTO

Oh yeah, oh yeah. You know it!

MARGIE

You've got nothing to be afraid of, you know. I'm not fickle.

[*Aside*] Not yet anyway.²¹

BLOTTO [*sings*]

"When soldiers come to town

I'm in a snit because

They fire a couple rounds."

And now, Margie, my dear, stand down, if you know what's good for you. Dismissed!

MARGIE

Could you just finish up . . . with that shoe before dinner? I've worked up quite an appetite.

BLOTTO

Do a little dance now, Margie!

MARGIE

Okay.

She dances.

BLOTTO

Do some dirty dancing. You know the kind I like. Come on baby, do the twist!^{©22}

MARGIE

Whatever you say, dear. I'll shake my little ass, and it goes like this!

Twist, twist![©]

She dances.

BLOTTO

Will you look at that crazy bitch! Shake, shake, shake! Shake, shake, shake! Shake your booty!® Encore! Encore! One, two, cha-cha-cha! Shake, baby, shake!®²³

MARGIE

I'm all weak in the knees, darling, I can't stand on my own—

BLOTTO

Oh no?

MARGIE

Not on your life.

BLOTTO

So sing me a little song, the better to please me.

MARGIE

The better to please you?

BLOTTO

That's right.

MARGIE

All right.

“Poor little doggies cry at night
They bark and bark and bark and bark
Except they're all bark and no bite.”

BLOTTO

There's a good girl! Now, for God's sake, get your ass over there and lie down.

MARGIE

Yes, yes, a thousand times. . . . You're on! What you want, baby I got it!®

BLOTTO

Margie!

MARGIE

Darling!

BLOTTO

Ten-hut! Good! Present arms! At ease!

MARGIE

[*She lies down and opens her arms.*] Like this? Sure. I'm all in.²⁴

BLOTTO

Am I a lucky guy or what to be married to you, bitch? Ten-hut! On your feet!

MARGIE

What for?

BLOTTO

On your feet, madam! And don't you be runnin' your mouth! Now get outta here and go find Jacko so he can have dinner with me.

MARGIE

No fuckin' way! I wouldn't be caught dead over there! It's his wife, Persephone. I'm not goin'! She'll blow her stack the minute she sees me. She's one scary bitch.

BLOTTO

This isn't like you, Margie.

MARGIE

[*With her best dance moves, which might end in a curtsey*] Darling, please.

BLOTTO

Oh for God's sake, fine. Just shut up. I'll do it myself. But if I've got to head out alone, you'll wait here all by yourself, ballerina.

[*Margie is perfectly happy to remain behind. She has other plans for herself.*]

[Scene 2]

[Lights up on the home of Jacko and Persephone]

[Persephone is getting ready for church with the greatest care as Jacko emerges from wherever he has been, probably from doing his obligatory chores. The two meet in the main living space. As Blotto approaches their home, whistling loudly, he eavesdrops on an argument that steadily increases in volume. Curiously, these events arouse him.]

JACKO *enters singing.*²⁵

“Adieu, adieu, my Katarina
Prettiest gal I seen, farewell!”

PERSEPHONE *enters*

And fuck you, asswipe! Go to hell! You lousy, filthy, stinkin’ sleaze!
Got lice, got zits, got pus, you reek! You scum! You prick! You pig! You
dick! Got VD for all I know.

[A brief bodily inspection might ensue.] What the fuck do you think this
is, a farce?

BLOTTO

Jesus H. Christ! Talk about your greetings and salutations! My little
Margie’s nothin’ like that!

JACKO

Oh for pity’s sake, couldn’t we just live together in peace and harmony?

PERSEPHONE

Fuck off! Get lost, Jackoff, before I beat the crap outta you. How’s
about *quatre cent coups* on your sorry ass?

[{To the audience} And fuck you too! I know goddamn well that
François fuckin’ Truffaut hasn’t been born yet!]

Now shut your goddamn trap, Jacko, or I’ll shut it for you! *[Get lost!
Go!]*

BLOTTO

I better get Jacko’s back!

[He does nothing, peering in instead on the melee while whistling and making ever louder comments.]

Pow! Bang! Wham! Bam! Hello! Hello!

JACKO

[Yeah, yeah, yeah.] I'm going, I'm going.²⁶

PERSEPHONE

And who's that dick brain out there? There, pussy, pussy, pussy!]²⁷

JACKO

Keep your voice down, wouldya?²⁸

PERSEPHONE

I said: Who the fuck's yellin' for you? God damn it! I'll bash your face in! Goddamn, stinkin', sleazy, slimy, scumbag!

JACKO

Fuck you, you vicious old bat! Fuck you, you old bag o' bones! [Take your fuckin' cunt and shove it up your ass!] And who the fuck do you think you are, denying your Lord three fuckin' times? You're gonna curse *me* out in my own damn home? [And in front of all these people?] And the cock crowed!²⁹

PERSEPHONE

[She might shove an apron at him and move to kick him into the kitchen.]
Take this! And see if your fuckin' buddy's surprised now!
[*{To Blotto}*] And what are *you* lookin' at, jackass?]

JACKO

Alas! Were the stars aligned against me that I should see *you* mistress of this house?

PERSEPHONE

Blow me! I'm off to Mass. And you better take care of the house while I'm gone.

JACKO

So get lost already. Go on! Go choke on your own bile!
Bitter as gall! She must be on the rag.

[Persephone storms off, turning around to gesticulate wildly at her husband, after which she changes her gestural tune for church.]

[Scene 3]

BLOTTO

[Very loudly] And thar' she blows! She's leavin'! *[Going, going, gone!]*
Seen it with my own eyes. Yo-ho-ho! Jacko! Where you at?

JACKO

[For his own part, he gesticulates wildly toward Persephone's backside as he addresses it and her.] I'm going, I'm going.

[To Blotto] Comin', comin'. Jeez, you need a little work on your stage whisper there, pal. And maybe you coulda whistled a little louder too. You tryin' to get us both killed?

BLOTTO

What's the big deal? The coast is clear.

JACKO

[Looking around] I guess so.

BLOTTO

What in the name of. . . Looked too dangerous to even knock. Holy cow!

JACKO

Come on. Let's go get some dinner.

BLOTTO

Great, let's go. Except . . . I don't know about you, Jacko, but I could sure use a little pick-me-up. And where o' where's a guy supposed to go?

“Sweet Jesus! There’s a little place I know:
It’s the called the Good-Times Inn. Come on, let’s go!
It’s just the best! You bet your life!”³⁰

JACKO

Okay, but can we bring your wife?

BLOTTO

No problem. Take my wife. Please!

[They might perform a drinking song or two that will also serve as traveling music.]

[Scene 4]

[At the home of Blotto and Margie]

[BLOTTO]

Margie!

MARGIE

What?

What can I do for you?³¹

[Jacko is overcome with shyness before Margie’s beauty; he nudges Blotto.]

BLOTTO

Go on: ask her.

JACKO

If you would be so kind, ma’am, as to join us. We request the honor of your presence for dinner at the Good-Times Inn.³²

MARGIE

Dinner you say? Why, I’d be delighted! I’m a girl with a healthy appetite.

BLOTTO

You can say that again. And away we go!

[They head for the Inn.]

[Scene 5]

[At the Good-Times Inn]

[BLOTTO]

Yo! Tarbender! Can we get some wine over here?

The INNKEEPER *enters*

Yes. *[He proceeds to do nothing.]*

BLOTTO

Ah, delighted to hear it.

The INNKEEPER

You wanna eat or what?

BLOTTO

Good evening and God bless, my good man. Now set us up with some o' the good stuff!

[The Innkeeper seats them among other patrons at the bar, where some rather nasty-looking bottles are on display. These libations will not have high marks for clarity.]

The INNKEEPER

Comin' right up. Got red—reddish.³³ Or white. A buck a pop. It's happy hour.

BLOTTO

Whatever! Just make it quick. We really need a drink.

JACKO

How's about you, Maggie the Cat? What'll you have?³⁴

MARGIE

I'll have what you two are having.

BLOTTO

[*With the militaristic tone of earlier*] Margie! You don't even know what I'm having yet.

Now: sing me a little song, the better to please me.

[*Margie begins her number. Since they have not ordered food, Blotto and Jacko might gorge themselves on anything and everything they can find at the bar: pretzels, maraschino cherries, lemon wedges, and the like. When the Innkeeper is otherwise occupied onstage or off, service-oriented Margie might go into the kitchen and help herself to more substantial fare, to be shared or not.*]

MARGIE

With pleasure, my darling, you're on.³⁵ O' Lord, hear my prayer:

"Give us this day our daily wine.

Give us the lilies of the field.

They toil not nor do they spin.

Santé! Nor do we sin.

Santé! Nor do we sin."

JACKO

Amen, brother! She sure can sing! God, you're a lucky man!

BLOTTO

Wanna swap?

JACKO

I'm in if you're in.

BLOTTO

You're on! I'm in. So . . . Fork over your wife.

*[Everyone turns toward the noise of a great commotion at the entrance, where a furious Persephone is seeking Jacko.]*³⁶

PERSEPHONE

Where the hell are you this time, you lousy, stinkin', drunk! I better not find you in here again!

JACKO

[To the Innkeeper] Sshh! I'm not here!

[To Blotto] Dude. She's headed this way!

BLOTTO

[Sizing her up] Wow. Now I'm *really* in. Just let me at her! That's one hot mama!³⁷

[Persephone enters the Inn. She is so beautiful that even the Innkeeper is on his best behavior.]

PERSEPHONE

Good eve. . . .³⁸ Where the hell is everybody? Hey, you! Barkeep! That jackass o' mine's here at the "Good-Times," right?

The INNKEEPER

I do believe that he and his party may well be here within.

PERSEPHONE

He and his party can go straight to hell. He's a pain in my ass!

[The Innkeeper naturally inspects the body part in question and might whisper in her ear. Persephone takes the opportunity to look him over as well. Blotto jumps up to greet her at the entrance.]

BLOTTO

Yo! What brings you by, *Madame*? Care to join us for a little drink?

PERSEPHONE

*[She takes a closer look at the Innkeeper.]*³⁹ Good evening, neighbor. How are you? What a pleasure it is to see you.

BLOTTO

Madame! Come on over here and sit by me. I've got a little proposition for you.

PERSEPHONE

[*Still gazing at the Innkeeper*] You're on.⁴⁰

JACKO [*nudging Blotto*]⁴¹

Go on! Are we gonna swap? Tell her.

PERSEPHONE

What?

BLOTTO

I was just fixing to tell you what. Your husband has given you to me, and I have given Margie to him.

PERSEPHONE

Oh really? You're on!

JACKO

All right! Let the good times roll![©] Put 'er there, Margie.

MARGIE

Why, I'd be delighted. You're on. Whatever Jackie wants, Jackie gets.^{©42}

JACKO

So let's go over to my place. [Now say bye-bye!] [*He starts to escort her out.*]

The INNKEEPER

[*To Persephone*] Hey, what about me?

[*To the men*] Bye-bye my ass! Who's got the check? [*He might hold up a veritable scroll of expenses.*]

BLOTTO

[*Tossing a few coins on the bar*] I've got this.

The INNKEEPER

And who's got the rest? What about my bread and my wine and my meat and my fowl?

BLOTTO

Oh put a lid on it. No harm, no foul. I'll be back again in no time. Just put it on my tab. I'm good for it.

The INNKEEPER

Uh-huh. Sure you are. Right.

BLOTTO

That's enough outta you. Why not just sit back and enjoy the show!⁴³

[Perhaps as a way of placating the Innkeeper, Blotto and Jacko do not head home but stay at the cabaret for a performance.]

[To everyone, including the audience] You'll be laughin' your ass[es] off in no time!

[Margie and Jacko also take their seats.]

Now, Persephone, if you please, I'd like a word with you.

PERSEPHONE

What?

BLOTTO

I was just fixing to tell you what. Your husband has given you to me, and I forked Margie over to him. So, sing me a little song, the better to please me.

PERSEPHONE

Sing? I will not.

BLOTTO

[Oh] no?

PERSEPHONE

No.

BLOTTO

You would deny me? One Saint Peter routine per play is more than enough, bitch! Now, when I say “sing,” you sing!

PERSEPHONE

Peter, shmeter! You’re a damn liar, you’re lyin’ through your teeth right now, and I’ll deny you as many times as I fuckin’ want!

BLOTTO

And you, madam, shall sing or I’ll beat you within an inch of your life. In front of all these people! Now sing, bitch!

PERSEPHONE

I will not.

[Although Persephone puts up serious resistance, he beats her into what he thinks is submission.]

BLOTTO

[To the audience] Girl’s got attitude.

Sing, Persephone! On the double! *[He beats her again in rhythm.]* And-a-one. And-a-two. And-a-one-two-three!

PERSEPHONE

Ow! Oh my God, oh my God. He’s kickin’ my ass! I think you broke my nose.

BLOTTO

You gonna sing now, or what, you damn cunt? Now sing, bitch!

PERSEPHONE

What am I supposed to sing? I don’t know any songs.

BLOTTO

How the hell should I know? Do “My man, I love him so”![©] Or do “Melancholy Baby”![©] Or show us your tits.

*She sings.*⁴⁴

[PERSEPHONE]

You'll never know.® "Watch your back or down you go!"

BLOTTO

Now, go over there and lie down.

PERSEPHONE

Aha! [*Like Margie in Scene 1, she rushes over to the couches and removes at least shoes, a jacket, a belt.*] Now you're talkin'! You're on!

BLOTTO

[*He briefly climbs on top of her.*] Yes, I am.

PERSEPHONE

Yes, you sure are. Thy will be done.

[*Blotto jumps up again and spins her around.*]

BLOTTO

And my will is: cut a fart!

PERSEPHONE

Excuse me? Fart? No lady ever cut one.

BLOTTO

And you ain't no lady! You'll let seven of 'em rip [right now this minute or, I swear to God!], I'll beat you till—

PERSEPHONE

Okay, okay, I feel a bunch o' farts on their way down right now! [*She hums a few bars from Carmen.*] Here comes the asshole, open up the . . . [*In his face*] Pouf! Pouf! Pouf! Pouf! Pouf!⁴⁵ There! What do you call that?

BLOTTO

Shit! Now that's what I call farting! But turn your ass around! Turn around! About face! What goes around comes around.
Carmen's a bitch!

PERSEPHONE

Turn around? I thought you'd never ask! You're on! [*His face is now exactly where she wants it for oral sex, the missionary position, or both.*]

BLOTTO

Back off! Round and round and round she goes. . . . Spin your partner!
Talk about your dirty dancing! [*He mimes another command.*]

PERSEPHONE

What?

BLOTTO

Let's see a few moves, bitch. Jump!

PERSEPHONE

You say "jump!" I say: "How high?"
[*{To the audience too}* What? You ain't seen no *Jackass Conjecture*?]
[*She does an acrobatic move that causes more farting.*] What do you call
that? Jumpin' Jack flash it's a gas, gas, gas![©]

BLOTTO

[I call it. . . .] First, you don't know jack. Now, it's jumpin' Jack flash.
Seems like, since you been hanging around me, you know plenty! Bitch
got rhythm! [All I gotta do is hum a few bars and. . . .]⁴⁶

[*With some well-timed choreography, the two couples trade places from
couches or beds to center stage.*]

JACKO

[*With an erotic maneuver*] Your turn now, honey. I'd like you to laugh.
Come on, how's about a little smile? [Laugh, clown, laugh!] Turn that
frown upside down!
[*{Possibly to the audience as well if they have not laughed enough}* What
the fuck! I said laugh!]

MARGIE

You don't have to ask me twice: I'll laugh, the better to please you. Ha-
ha, hee-hee, ho-ho![©] [They're coming to take me away![©]]

JACKO

Encore! Encore! [*Whacking her in the ass*] Hit it again harder! harder!
[harder]!

MARGIE

Ha-ha, hee-hee, ho-ho![®] [*Ideally, she gets a much better response from the audience.*] Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! How do you like *them* giggles?
[*She has a giggle fit and stops, exhausted.*]

JACKO

That's the best laughin' I ever seen in my life!⁴⁷

MARGIE

But once I pop, I can't stop. I'm all laughed out. Sorry. I hope you're not too disappointed.

JACKO

No, no, my dear, not at all.

BLOTTO

What about you, Persephone? You sorry?

PERSEPHONE

Sorry but happy. Oh baby, made it hurt so good![®] Now, I've had the time of my life. . . . [*Turning to Blotto*] And I owe it all to you!^{®48}

JACKO

[*To his Wife, Persephone*] So? How now, madam? How are you feeling?
[*Persephone continues to direct her responses to Blotto.*]

PERSEPHONE

Feelin' real good, thank you. Ready to do whatever you desire.⁴⁹

JACKO

Which is exactly what I was askin' for. And there's plenty that I desire 'cause you sure are built! Just look at that caboose!

BLOTTO

She makes noises too. Wanna hear?

JACKO

Yes, please.

BLOTTO

You got it, Jacko. Watch the birdie. Polly wanna. . . .

PERSEPHONE

[*Inching closer to Blotto*] Polly really, *really* wanna cracker. Hush, little baby, don't say a word: mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird!^{©50}

JACKO

Ooh, baby! Permission to approach? I can't wait to get a closer look at mama.

PERSEPHONE

No John, no John, no John, no![©]

JACKO

Enough with the Saint Peter routine! I'll have you right now this very minute!

BLOTTO

You'll have her, is it?

JACKO

Damn right!

BLOTTO

Jacko, you lie! You will *not* have her!

[*Jacko and Blotto start pulling at the retrained Persephone.*]

PERSEPHONE

Mother Mary!

JACKO

What the. . . ? Dude, she's my wife! To have and . . . [*grabbing Persephone*] to hold!

BLOTTO

You will *not* have her!

[ENDING A: The New Marital Order]

PERSEPHONE

[*She clings to Blotto.*] But I'm *his* now!⁵¹

MARGIE

She has a point.

[*The physical push and pull that ensues might look rather like square dancing, with much combative enactment of "swing your partner." Regardless of who gains the upper hand at any given moment, everyone winds up with a more compatible spouse: Jacko with Margie, Blotto with Persephone. A grand promenade would work well, as would a Virginia reel, or any medieval dance that features changing partners.*]

PERSEPHONE

[*She moves toward Blotto.*] Darling.

[*Jacko again tries to grab Persephone, but Blotto wins. Margie is insulted. She points to Jacko and addresses her lawfully wedded husband, Blotto.*]

MARGIE

That's her husband. Hey!⁵²

BLOTTO

[*He grabs Persephone.*] Right . . . me!

PERSEPHONE

[*She pushes Margie toward Jacko and clings to Blotto.*] Right . . . him!

[Jacko grabs Persephone again.]

JACKO

No way, I say! Mine! The girl is mine!®

MARGIE

Seems so.⁵³

[Margie, however, understands before Jacko does that a new and improved world order is about to be established, so she grabs Jacko.]

PERSEPHONE

He's all yours!⁵⁴

[At this point Jacko doesn't know whom to grab and, since he is so slow on the uptake, he might even alternate between the two women. Ultimately, he will hang onto Persephone.]

JACKO

No, mine!⁵⁵

BLOTTO

You're a damn liar and you can go straight to hell!

JACKO

Who, me? No, you!

[Everyone plays quickly the children's patty-cake game "Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?"]

[BLOTTO

Couldn't be!

MARGIE

Then who?

PERSEPHONE

{With pride, she indicates Blotto.} Number One stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

{Margie indicates Jacko.}

MARGIE

Who, him?

PERSEPHONE

{To Blotto} No, you!

JACKO

Couldn't be!

MARGIE

Then who?

JACKO

Number Two stole the cookies from the cookie jar?]

[Ending A-1: Blotto tricks Jacko and ejects Jacko and Margie from the Good-Times]

[Before Jacko even has time to notice, Blotto takes a peek at the bar tab, shoves it into Jacko's back pocket, and executes a final dance move—a "sleight-of-foot"—that positions the newly formed couple of Jacko and Margie at the entrance to the Good-Times Inn. Blotto then uses his foot to kick them out, such that he remains at the cabaret with Persephone.]

BLOTTO

And adieu! Yo, [Jacko! Time to pay the piper! Lotsa luck, Jackoff—and, by the way, this one's on you, dumb ass!]

JACKO

You'll pay for this! [*{He brandishes the veritable scroll of a bar tab.}*] And what about this?]⁵⁶

[Ending A-2: Jacko tricks Blotto and spirits Margie out the door]

[In this scenario, Jacko isn't quite as dumb as he looks. Rather, he is playing the weakling in order to try to wind up with Margie. Here, it's Jacko who sticks the bar tab in Blotto's pocket and commits the "sleight-of-foot" dance move that repositions the two new couples. He quickly spirits Margie out the door, leaving Blotto with Persephone to cue the final number. This would also explain Blotto's annoyance at winning the battle but still being stuck with the tab.]

BLOTTO

Adieu to. . . Hey! Wait a minute! What's the big idea, Jacko? God-damn Jackoff! You'll pay for this!—and, shit!—you can pay for *this* too!

[Ending A-3: Margie tricks Blotto, and she and Jacko run out together]

[In this scenario, it's Margie who isn't quite so passive as she looks. Having already been back and forth from the kitchen of the Good-Times, she is ideally placed to grab the bar tab. She is the one who sticks it (the tab) publicly to Blotto; and Blotto tries to give it back. But Margie has quickly joined up with Jacko, who finally twigs, and the two run out together, leaving Blotto with Persephone to cue the final number. This scenario continues to explain Blotto's annoyance at winning the battle but still being stuck with the tab.]

BLOTTO

Adieu? Not so fast! Hey, Jacko! What about the bill?

JACKO

Boy oh boy, are *you* gonna be sorry!

[Resolution to Endings A]

[Blotto yells a last taunt at the ousted Margie, who is now at some distance.]

BLOTTO

And hey, you! Yo! [Marge!]

MARGIE

What is it, *husband*?

BLOTTO

Get back here and check it out! This little sweetie pie's comin' on home with me.⁵⁷

MARGIE

Ooh! Sounds good to me. [All's well that ends well.]⁵⁸ So get on with the damn conclusion already. [We haven't got all day.]

BLOTTO

All's well that ends well indeed. And I can hardly wait to conclude these proceedings.

[ENDING B: The Status Quo of the Old Marital Order]

PERSEPHONE

[*Indicating Jacko*] I *do* belong to *him*.

MARGIE

True enough.

[*Jacko grabs Persephone and tries to walk out with her. She struggles, looking imploringly toward Blotto.*]

PERSEPHONE

Darling.

[*Margie grabs Jacko and speaks to him, while pointing at Blotto.*]

MARGIE

Check it out. *That's* her husband now. [I wish!]

BLOTTO

[*He indicates Margie with a sigh.*] And that one's all mine.⁵⁹

PERSEPHONE

[Still aggressive, she indicates Jacko, pushing her lawfully wedded spouse at Margie.] No, that would be *him*.⁶⁰

[Jacko moves toward Persephone and, then, much more assertive, makes a grab at Margie but then gives up.]

JACKO

[With a sigh, he indicates Persephone.] No way, I swear, as in no way out. It's me.

MARGIE

Ain't that the truth!⁶¹

PERSEPHONE

Fat fucking chance!⁶²

JACKO

[With another sigh, he indicates Persephone again.] Right. That one's all mine.

[Blotto despises being contradicted, so he now changes his tune and fights for his original wife, Margie.]

BLOTTO

You're a damn liar and you can go straight to hell!

JACKO

Who, me? No, you!

[Everyone quickly plays the children's patty-cake game "Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?"]

[BLOTTO

Couldn't be!

MARGIE

Then who?

PERSEPHONE

{She indicates Jacko and Margie.} Number Nine stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

{Margie is slow on the uptake and indicates Blotto.}

MARGIE

Who, him?

PERSEPHONE

{To Jacko} No, you!

JACKO

Couldn't be!

MARGIE

Then who?

{Jacko makes a last grab for Margie.}

JACKO

Number Two stole the cookies from the cookie jar!]

[Ending B-1: Blotto tricks Jacko and ejects Jacko and Persephone from the Good-Times]

[Despite Jacko's last-ditch effort, Blotto wins. Before Jacko even has time to notice, Blotto grabs the bar tab, shoves it into Jacko's back pocket, and executes a final dance move: this time, with a "sleight-of-foot" that reestablishes the original couples. He then uses his foot to kick out Jacko and Persephone. He remains with his original wife, Margie, at the cabaret of the Good-Times in order to cue the final production number.]

BLOTTO

And adieu! Yo! [Bye-bye, now, Jacko! Yo! Jackoff! Whaddaya got to say for yourself now? And, by the way, this one's on you, dumb ass!]

Yo! Margie!

[Ending B-2: Jacko tricks Blotto and spirits Persephone out the door]

[In yet another scenario, Margie is by no means as obliging as she seems. Perhaps Persephone has not only worn her out but worn off on her . . . in which case, not even Jacko would be so interested. Here, it's Jacko who finally catches on and sticks the bar tab in Blotto's pocket, and it's Jacko who executes that "sleight-of-foot" dance move that repositions the two original, lawfully wedded couples. And, here, Jacko also commits the act of a true submissive, albeit with a brief foray into domination. Jacko pushes Persephone out the door, leaving Margie and Blotto—the latter, now a trompeur trompé—inside the Good-Times to cue the final number. Once Jacko and Persephone are outside at some distance, a marvelous mimed sequence could represent the immediate resumption of Persephone's dominatrix role.]

BLOTTO

Adieu? God damn it, Jackoff, this is the thanks I get? You're not stickin' me with the tab! Boy oh boy, are you gonna be sorry. . .
Yo! Margie!

[Ending B-3: Persephone tricks everyone and kicks Jacko out of the Good-Times]

[In this scenario, consistent with her frenzied entrance into the Inn, it's Persephone who reasserts herself, preferring to be a dom in her original household. She is the one who sticks the tab in Blotto's pocket. She then grabs Jacko by the collar, kicks him out of the Good-Times, and renews her abuse. Blotto and Margie remain at the Inn to cue the final number.]

BLOTTO

[To Persephone] And adieu!

Yo! Jacko! Whaddaya got to say for yourself now, Jackoff? And . . . hey! what about your fair share? *[He eyes the bill as well as whatever corporal punishment Persephone is inflicting upon Jacko.]* You'll pay all right!
Yo! Margie!

[Resolution to Endings B]

MARGIE

What is it, o husband of mine?

BLOTTO

I guess we better go. Come on along home with me now.⁶³

MARGIE

Gee, I can hardly wait. [All's well that ends well, I guess.] So do your last bit and let's get it over with already.

[Final Envoi for All Endings]

BLOTTO

The moral of the story's all in fun.
You got a shrew at home? You know the one.
Don't you be givin' bitches to a Jackoff!
She'll only bust his head! He lost, I won?
You got a shrew at home? You know the one.
Give 'er to me, schmuck, I'm second to none.⁶⁴
I'll tame your hothead shrew. That bitch will back off.
You got a shrew at home? You know the one.
Don't you be givin' bitches to a Jackoff!
[Yo, Jacko! Bitch! How's about a closing number for these folks?]
Hey, Jackoff! Come on back here, don't be shy.
Come out! How 'bout a song to say good-bye?⁶⁵

[Possible closing music]⁶⁶

The END—*What's done is done / du fait le fait.*

10.

Husband Swap, or, Swap Meat

Le Trocheur de maris

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The HUSBAND TRADER (*Le Trocheur de Maris*)

CINDY LOU, the FIRST WIFE (*La Première Commère*)

CHARLOTTE, the SECOND WIFE (*La Deuxième Commère*)

ANNA NICOLE, the THIRD WIFE (*La Troisième Commère*)

[A fair number of Male Extras to play the “merchandise”]

[The Three Husbands of the Three Wives]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce nouvelle à quatre personnages, c'est ascavoir: le Trocheur de maris, la premyère Femme, la II^e Femme et la III^e Femme*, #60 from the *Recueil La Vallière*, appears in one published edition only: it is the nineteenth and final play of vol. 3 of Le Roux de Lincy and Michel, *RFMSJ* (cited here, as before, by volume and page number alone). Helpful plot summaries are provided by Petit de Julleville in *RTC*, #206 (250–51); and by Faivre in *Répertoire*, #169 (424–25). This anonymous play is 227 octosyllabic verses for Petit de Julleville and 230 for Faivre. To my knowledge, there is no modern French or English translation.

Plot

It's a curious thing that this marvelous play was edited only once. It is a theatrical version of the lyric genre known as the *chanson de la mal mariée* or the “song of the unhappily married woman.”¹ It has the unusual merit of staging three women talking together at some length. It offers up the mirror image

of the “swapportunities” envisioned by our previous play. (If you saw a Yo-plait commercial in the second decade of the twenty-first century, then you’ll know that neologism.) And, even in the surreal, exaggerated world of farce, it presents what I expect is a fairly realistic picture of what medieval married life was like for many women. In *Husband Swap*, three gossipy wives (sister *commères* to Mrs. Noah in *Noah’s Flood*) are in the midst of a habitual gripe session about their not-better halves. Initially, things might suggest an imminent swap in which the women will rotate their husbands, each one to the next—one, two, three, one, two, three—but the desirability of that option becomes less and less plausible as the plot unfolds.

Enter the Husband Trader advertising a rematch made in heaven. By his own proclamation, he is there for wish fulfillment, to make their *fantasies* come true (*RFMSJ*, 3: 4). Sounds fantastic, right? So is he their *deus ex machina*?

Not.

Unfortunately, his inventory resembles a pile of remainders. Eager though the ladies might be to trade in their husbands for new models, they are singularly unimpressed by the options available on the open meat market. They want hot, faithful, and kind; their choices are dirty, tired, and paunchy (as Meryl Streep’s Miranda Priestly protests in her first scene in *The Devil Wears Prada*.) Ultimately, the play’s spectacular objectification of the male of the species prompts all three women to opt for the devils they know. They thereby confirm some proverbial wisdom that encapsulates the moral(s) of the story: the other woman’s grass is always greener; can’t live with ’em, can’t live without ’em; can’t live with ’em, can’t kill ’em.

What little has been written about our play is unenthusiastic. Although Faivre adores the tantalizing theme of the commodified “man-as-sex-object” (*Répertoire*, 424), he feels that the dramatic execution is a bore and that the plot is not verisimilar. (Clearly, he was unfamiliar with American reality TV.) Faivre isn’t wrong, of course, that, even in the over-the-top world of medieval farce, a Husband Trader ought to have better merchandise on display in order to close the deal (425). But there is a brilliance nonetheless to the *Trocheur*’s sales pitch, presciently tailored as it is to three ladies whom he has never met. And what about those everywomen, Cindy Lou, Charlotte, and Anna Nicole? *Pace* Faivre, their own lives are neither boring nor nonverisimilar. Nor is yet another farcically Pyrrhic victory in which women prefer an unacceptable status quo. Unlike the other swappers in this collection, all three have the intelligence and savvy to see what’s coming; but, when they decline to accept new husbands who might be even worse than the ones they’ve got, their prescience

but “empowers” them to remain in unhappy marriages. To add insult to injury, their resignation, coupled here with their alleged preference for odious, unappealing, abusive husbands, is then cast as a shortcoming of female character. That is to say that sad experience has failed to teach the three wives even the most basic maxim of civilized social intercourse. As the contemporaneous Rabelais so famously put it in the Prologue to *Gargantua*: don’t judge a book by its cover. Actually, what he said was *l’habit ne fait pas le moine*, or “the robe does not make the monk” [*Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 4.] The wifely clientele of *Husband Swap* is hardly interested in living like monks; then again, given the bros’ reputation, a peek under their robes might be in order (Trappists, Cordeliers, what have you). And yet, in the typical comedic turnabout as misogynistically unfair play, that is precisely what the women do when rejecting the proposed replacement partners on physique alone: they judge the book—no, the bro—by his cover. In a word, none of this is terribly funny; but that doesn’t stop the terrible from being funny, a favorite *modus operandi* of farce that we have seen before. Certainly, it is no prerequisite of the genre that audiences split their sides only at what is amusing. But mightn’t the source of all the jocularly be more unfunny still? Within the scope of the satire of *Husband Swap*, mightn’t there be another marriage at stake?

Technically, the answers to that question fall under our rubric of “Language”; but they warrant discussion under “Plot” in that they may shed some light on what lies beneath the play’s surface or, in keeping with that Rabelaisian outlook, between the covers of its book and under any brother’s ample robe. *Husband Swap* features at least two religiously charged terms associated with the theological crisis that would rock Europe, culminating in the wars of religion: the Protestant Reformation. And it bears mention that, although such terminology is standard fare for morality plays, it is relatively uncommon in farce. Among the many theological debates that pitted Catholics against nascent Protestants, many of which are germane to the theory and practice of theater, is the matter of the limits of marriage, including the question of whether priests should be permitted to marry, a bone of contention that has endured to the present day.² And, if that doesn’t sound like especially lighthearted material, it helps to channel something like the rollicking, frolicking atmosphere of *Sister Act* (1992), in which Whoopi Goldberg as Sister Mary Clarence ponders what it might be like to be married to the big JC. At one point in *Husband Swap*, Charlotte complains that her husband is hot to take up with a Protestant woman, *une huguenote* (3: 9), and Cindy Lou dismisses one of the Trader’s distasteful display specimens as a *pestilleur*

de morisque (3: 12). In all likelihood, the latter term refers to the would-be Lothario's poor dance moves, both on and off the dance floor. (The script alludes to another dance as well: the *allemande*.) But the *morisque* has additional, more vexed connotations.

As described in the sixteenth century by Thoinot Arbeau (*Orchésographie*, 94r–95v), it is a frenetic dance of Moorish origin that pejoratively denotes a Spanish Muslim forced to convert to Catholicism. Nor, I suspect, is it mere coincidence that Rabelais completes his famous *l'habit ne fait pas le moine* with this: “and a man may wear a Spanish cape [*cape Hespanole*] who in courage has no relation to Spain” (4).³ The Reformation has more than a passing terpsichorean relation to Spain. Indeed, monks, books, and Spanish-style Catholicism go together with sex, religion, and assault in the warlike Reformation sieges depicted by such a play as the *Moralité à six personnages*. Moreover, that fascinating morality play appears in the *RLV* in close proximity to *Le Trocheur de maris* (#56 to our play's #60). It is a *moralité* that visualizes—and enacts (at least virtually)—the rape of the Church, be it anal or missionary, thus playing straight the very issue that the *Farce of the Fart* plays as hilarious (*FF*, 81–82).⁴ Therefore, could it be that what the three ladies of *Husband Swap* would really like to do is swap one husband, one doctrine, one daddy, one Father for another?

If there is a saving grace for our female characters, it is neither salvific nor graceful. Instead, it is a strong hint that they will manage to stick it to their hopeless spouses. In the end, they reluctantly keep the faith, but—close readers that they are of the marital subtext—with whatever loopholes they can find.⁵ They'll dance the *morisque* or any other two-step with the sacramental hubby that brung 'em. . . and with whomever else they crave.

Characters and Character Development

In the text, all three female characters are identified only as *les femmes* or *les commères* (women, wives, gossips, or busybodies). They often address one another as *ma commère*, which, depending on the woman, I render as “girl,” “sister,” “honey,” “dear,” “girlfriend,” or the like. I have bestowed names upon all three unnamed women because not only does it make for less confusion on the page, it better conveys their distinct personalities. Following textual clues as to their physical appearance and speech patterns, I have called them Cindy Lou (the First Wife), Charlotte (the Second Wife), and—wait for it—Anna Nicole (the Third Wife). Their age is important but unspecified,

as when, toward the end of the play, Cindy Lou ventures that they are “too old to change” (3: 15). (Given that a fifteenth or sixteenth-century wife was practically over the hill at the ripe old age of nineteen, the trio could thus be in their early twenties—a perfect fit for productions on a college campus.) All three are regular churchgoers, if for social opportunities alone. And all three have very particular complaints about their husbands, all framed in very particular ways.

The First Wife, Cindy Lou, has married above her station in life. Originally, she was a country girl, so I’ve scripted her with some Southernisms. Her primary complaint is that her husband is a *coureur de jupes*, a “skirt-chasing” philanderer who disdains his marriage vows. (Based on Cindy Lou’s list of grievances, one can only wonder about his success rate.) She seems to receive the lion’s share of attention from the Husband Trader, so she should be gorgeous enough to stir the rivalry of Charlotte and Anna Nicole. She is probably a blonde and, yes, medieval blondes like Isolde had more fun too . . . if you can call it that. Cindy Lou is a forerunner to Mrs. Malaprop; at the very least, she may not fully cotton on to all the sexual equivocation coming out of her mouth. Compare her, say, to Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner’s Daughter* (1980), who doesn’t understand the word “horny” and gets ousted from a radio interview when uttering the word on the air. Chief among Cindy Lou’s objections to her mate: he’s dopey, flirtatious with other women, and as stingy with the purse at home as he is generous extramaritally with his other “purse.” (If he has a pistol in his pocket, he’s not happy to see her.) Mostly, she is stunned and disappointed by the corporeal if not necessarily carnal knowledge that comes with marriage. In bed, she is treated to every bodily function except sex: he’s Dopey, Sleepy, Sneazy, and Grumpy all rolled into one.

Wife Number Two, Charlotte, is rather ladylike throughout, albeit with the occasional slip into vulgarity. She speaks with slightly better grammar than the others and, since she cites more experience, she is perhaps somewhat older than Cindy Lou and Anna Nicole. Charlotte is aggravated because—I’m channeling Jeff Foxworthy here—her husband might be a redneck. She finds him stubborn, base, classless, and attracted to trash of similar ilk, not the worst of whom include Protestant floozies (3: 9). If her Bible-thumping qualities are brought out in the *mise-en-scène*, then, by all means, rechristen her “Prudence” or “Chastity.” But another twist is the intimation that she would in fact relish *more* infidelity from her loser husband so that she might be spared his person.

Last of the ladies but by no means least, the Third Wife is the third wheel. Cindy Lou and Charlotte couldn't care less about her troubles. As a matter of fact, they do their best to ignore her as she tries—and fails—to dominate the conversation. Their standoffishness may derive from the Third Wife's obsession with sex and her salty way of discussing it. She is sexually insatiable yet unsated, owing, as she would say, to a husband whom she can't get to fuck her. "Anna Nicole" suits her, all the more so in that the physical comedy works better if she has enormous breasts. (Think about the favorite camera angle for filming Christina Hendricks's Joan Holloway on *Mad Men*.) I hear Anna Nicole with a Brooklyn accent, but do feel free to drop it if you hear something else. Her woes are numerous: hubby is conceited, proud, arrogant, stubborn, jealous, and possessive. He is also a wife beater, such that there is something profoundly tragic about the gallows humor with which a victim of domestic violence desperately seeks a swap *meat*.

As for our traveling salesman (*le Trocheur*), he is a vendor, a peddler, or a swapper of husbands; but I've called him a "Husband Trader" by analogy to "horse trader," this one catering to frustrated fillies. He specializes in preowned husbands that are not exactly in mint condition. To borrow the lingo from eBay, they are not even in "gently" or "excellent" used condition (EUC). Imagine any number of contemporary traders, from used-car salesmen to Craigslist, who don't exactly earn high marks for ethics or for customer satisfaction. The Husband Trader is farce's archetypal snake-oil-selling charlatan:⁶ sleazy, verbose, and, one can assume, an eavesdropper to boot. (If he is both a voyeur and an *écouteur*, that provides one possible explanation for his ability to hawk his wares with selling points that correspond just a bit too closely to the very deficits the three women have just expounded.) However, his limited knowledge of his chosen profession is more than matched by boundless knowledge of the medieval comic theater. In his opening pitch (3: 3–4), he alludes to a handful of farces for which the audience presumably shares his familiarity and enthusiasm.⁷ It is difficult to assign him a stable speech pattern because he adapts his style and level of discourse to each woman.

Husband Swap also presents multiple opportunities for nonspeaking roles, starting with the three objectionable husbands. The women's portraits are so lively that they all but beg for mimed flashbacks. (Compare them to Herman's descriptions in #1, *The Newlywed Game*.)

But nothing rivals the other roles that are compelled by the demonstrative nature of the Husband Trader's veritable show-and-tell of his merchandise:

the *pièces de résistance* for gals in the market are pieces of ass *de résistance*. There are seventeen—count 'em!—*seventeen* husband specimens that he trails along with him. Vividly described in Scene 4, they are of all shapes and sizes; and their physique, demeanor, and character are elaborated in such painstaking detail that I need not preview them here. Suffice it to say that teasing out the comic and tragic potential of *Husband Swap* unambiguously demands that the merchandise appear onstage (below, § “Sets and Staging”).

Language

Although, as usual, I've opted for prose, there is a distinctly singsong, musical, vaudevillian flavor to some of the exchanges, which is conspicuous in the two key refrains of the play (and their variants). The first refrain involves the women goading one another into consultation with the Husband Trader: *Y vous le fault donc trocher* (“you have to trade him in); *Y nous les fault donc trocher* (“we have to trade *them* in), or *Y nous les fault tous troys trocher* (“we [three] have to trade all three of them in”). The second refrain pipes up when the wives reject each and every proposed replacement: *Par ma foy, y ne me duict point* (“My goodness, he won't do at all” or “he doesn't do a thing for me,” “he doesn't appeal to me in the slightest”). For all we know, these lines were call-outs to popular songs of the day. Thus, it makes sense that they be sung to original music, rapped, choreographed, or any combination thereof.

Not surprisingly, we also encounter a frank vernacular for sex and its body parts, as in the expression *lache amanché* (3: 7). Before the ear can process the third syllable, it *sounds like* a “fearful lover” (*lache amant*). However, the term more likely indicates how the husband's “measuring stick” or “handle” is hanging. Size is important; and the Husband Trader knows it when he later purports to have in stock a stud who is bigger and better. Step right up, folks, hurry, hurry, hurry to the greatest show on earth. And it's not Chippendales.

Sets and Staging

When the lights first come up, Charlotte and Anna Nicole are near the flea market. A backdrop depicting their three respective homes could facilitate mimed flashbacks with the three husbands. The principal set is obviously the flea market or swap meet, which proves quite the spectacular event and quite the production. True, as noted above, the “Cast of Characters” lists only four actors; but that number is potentially multiplied sixfold (or more) if

we count the three husbands and seventeen husband samples, and stock the market with extras. Dauntingly, we're talking about more than thirty people onstage and even about the possibility of bigger laughs on smaller stages. Throughout the play, the four main characters are in the audience's face, often addressing the spectators directly with no regard for any so-called fourth wall. For example, during the Husband Trader's self-promotional speech and the wives' subsequent gripe session, it is almost as if the audience is waiting in line at a complaint department where the staff complains as much as the customers. Dramaturgical recourse to Monty Python's "Argument Clinic" will inspire.⁸

Most important: when and how to reveal the product line. This a privileged moment of comic timing that must be chosen carefully, inasmuch as it will determine whether *Husband Swap* plays as comedy or tragedy. On one hand, the display of husbandly wares is the indisputable comic highpoint of the play. The Husband Trader could be flailing about, trying to herd the men together like sheep. Keeping track of seventeen men is tough—and not just for the director. Is the beefcake introduced en masse—*en vrac*—or exhibited one by one? Do the animals come in two by two? Is there a volume discount? On the other hand, the selfsame scene might just as readily constitute the tragic low point, especially in light of the domestic abuse of Anna Nicole and the veiled threat of suicide issued by Charlotte (below, note 21). If shackled, the males of the species might be evocative less of a merry band of goofy actors or Basochiens and, more heartrendingly, of a prison chain gang, slaves, or victims of human trafficking. Indeed, much as we shall see in our next play, it is virtually impossible to represent such subjection without eliciting analogies to contemporary horrors. Nor is it unreasonable to invoke themes of enslavement in medieval marriage.

That said, I suspect that the farcical truth lies somewhere in between, in which case the scene could lend itself anew to a hyperreal *comédie-ballet*. This sort of thing worked well in the beloved postmedieval *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), which transformed the violence of the legendary rape of the Sabine women into an adorable romantic musical. Equally befitting the gallows humor of *Husband Swap*, the three ladies might be modeled on Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda, and—that's right—Dolly Parton in the 1980 film *Nine to Five*, in which exploited women workers take revenge on their vile, sexist, and unfair employer by abducting him (a theme more recently reprised by *Horrible Bosses* [2011], in its sequel of 2014, and, if the Internet is any guide, in possibly more nonsense to come). The seriocomic effects all stand

to be heightened, moreover, by a final challenge related to *Husband Swap*: Do Cindy Lou, Charlotte, and Anna Nicole bring their objectified husbands along with them to market? After all, this is a medieval swap meet: it is logical that they would tote along something to trade in. Perhaps they are merely on a reconnaissance mission, which is one way to stage the play. But perhaps they too have leashed, chained, or manacled the spouses, conduct for which they can be further denigrated for having abused the very husbands who abuse them (which comprises yet another classic MO of farce). In *Husband Swap*, we must see through an ass darkly.

Costumes and Props

Plain and simple, the main “props” are animate: the seventeen husband specimens. Additionally, the Husband Trader possesses other tools of his trade, such as elixirs in old pharmacy bottles, bookkeeping ledgers, scrolls, official registers, and the like. The rest of his merchandise is consistent with that of any con artist. In an act of metacommentary, he sports supplies, costumes, and props for the parade of floor models: castanets, riding crops, musical instruments, swords, and whatever else does the job. For the women, signature fashion statements should suit whichever aspects of their caricatures are being accentuated, such as ill-fitting couture for Cindy Lou, Victorian collars for Charlotte, huge décolletage for Anna Nicole, and so on.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

“Walk This Way.” By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.

“Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” Traditional spiritual.

“Poor, Poor Pitiful Me.” By Warren Zevon. BMI Work #1189347.

“You’re Lookin’ at Country.” By Loretta Lynn. BMI Work #1729131.

“C’est Magnifique.” By Cole Porter. ASCAP ID: 330000583.

“Handy Man.” By Otis Blackwell, Jimmy Jones, and Charles Merenstein.
BMI Work #5720509.

“The Shady Dame from Seville.” By Leslie Bricusse and Henry Mancini.
ASCAP Work ID: 490483028.

“I Am a Fine Musician.” [“Ich bin ein Musikante.”] Traditional, based on a German folk song. BMI Work #13902045.⁹

“Changes.” By David Bowie. BMI Work #198130.

“Gimme Some Lovin.” By Spencer Davis, Muff Winwood, and Stephen Lawrence Winwood. BMI Work #469118.

“Love and Marriage.” By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen. ASCAP Work ID: 420081361.

[Possible opening music]¹⁰

[Scene 1]

[Lights up on Charlotte and Anna Nicole, who are engaged in a highly animated discussion near the flea market. The latter is sobbing and flailing as Charlotte tries desperately to extricate herself. Their pantomime will continue throughout Scene 1, the two women oblivious to the sights and sounds around them.]

Enter the Husband Trader to set up shop. At an opportune moment during his lengthy hawking cry, Cindy Lou makes a hasty entrance, looking high and low for her friends. She pauses long enough to listen to all or part of the Husband Trader’s sales pitch.]

The Husband Trader begins

The HUSBAND TRADER

And who might I be? Walk this way![®]
Your husband-swappin’ handyman.
I’m new to these here parts today.

And who might I be? Walk this way![®]
I got the know-how. Pay to play!
Got skills to answer “Yes, I can!”

And who might I be? Walk this way![®]
Your husband-swappin’ handyman.

Got Tom or Harry? Dick or Dan?
Got Mr. Johnson? Girly man?¹¹
Got John-Boy Hick who makes you sick?¹²
Or some “poor bastard” sticks his dick¹³
Into your business? Screw his junk!

Forget your pervert priest or monk!

C'est moi! Your perfect *chevalier!*

In all I do, in all I say.

Abracadabra! Swap away!

There's not a hefty price to pay!

You're hubby's just a dumb-ass hick?

You'll have a frisky hunk right quick.

He stubborn? Jealous? Just a fool?

You'll have a good guy, not a tool.

Don't know his elbow from his ass?

You'll have yourself a stud first-class!

Is he a brute? He's impolite?

I got one won't put up a fight.

A drunken lout in bars all night?

You'll have a better spouse, all right!

Make you a deal. I really care.

For ladies, I got savoir-faire

Your handyman, known far and wide.

So step right up! Gimme a try!

Your fantasies may now come true!

[*He gestures toward Charlotte and Anna Nicole.*]

[*I'll wait right here. There's ladies nigh.*

Their fantasies can now come true.]¹⁴

[Scene 2]

[*Having spotted her friends, Cindy Lou rushes toward them. After trying to catch her breath, she speaks to Charlotte only. Throughout the scene, Anna Nicole is interrupted and ignored by the other two women, which annoys her to no end. At some point, the Husband Trader will go over to eavesdrop on the women.*]

CINDY LOU, the FIRST WIFE

God bless you, honey, how are you?

CHARLOTTE, the SECOND WIFE

Welcome, dear. Where have you been? Do sit down.

ANNA NICOLE, the THIRD WIFE

I barely recognized you in the state you're in!

CINDY LOU

[*Again, to Charlotte alone*] God bless you, honey, how are you?

CHARLOTTE

Welcome, dear. Where have you been? Do sit down.¹⁵ I must tell you, you're just in time.

ANNA NICOLE

As I was saying . . . I got somethin' I really need to get off my chest and, sister, you'll never guess what.

CINDY LOU

I reckon I can.

CHARLOTTE

My husband is utterly intolerable. A madman. The most obstinate man ever born. The meanest, the nastiest. . . . Absolutely horrid. Never a kind word. Never a kind gesture. It's just not in him.

ANNA NICOLE

As I was saying. . . . God damn! I got me one that's even worse. Okay, maybe he's not a complete moron. At least he's got a sense o' humor 'n' all.¹⁶ But—if I'm lyin', I'm dyin'—he is the pits. The worst ever. The most uppity man on the face o' this earth.

CINDY LOU

Lord have mercy! In the name of Saint Peter, my good ol' boy don't think o' nobody but hisself. And he can't keep nothin' in his head. Dumb as a bag o' hammers.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, for heaven's sake! I'll see your Peter and raise you one John-Boy. Mine's a hillbilly! Plus he's got himself a girlfriend. Mind you, I could perhaps put up with it if she were at least young and pretty and . . . actually provided him with a little service.

ANNA NICOLE

Mine is incredibly impatient.

[*There is no response.*]

I swear! It's the God's honest truth. He's hard-headed. Stubborn as a damn mule! Whole package ain't worth a dime! And he's nasty.

CINDY LOU

And my good ol' boy's *real* friendly. *Too* friendly. Always on the prowl. I guess y'all could say that, when he ain't fuckin' up, he's hookin' up!

CHARLOTTE

[*To Cindy Lou only*] You're quite wrong to complain, you know.

ANNA NICOLE

Not me!

CINDY LOU

[*To Anna Nicole*] Are too.

CHARLOTTE

Really, now, think about it: a man who takes pleasure—great pleasure—in . . . inserting himself with the ladies. Always ready to lend a helping hand.

ANNA NICOLE

And you two are complainin'? Jesus Christ!

CHARLOTTE

I most certainly am, dear.

CINDY LOU

[*To Anna Nicole*] You got no cause.

[*To Charlotte*] Mine's rotten to the core. And, know what else? He don't smell too good. He stinks, y'all. He *reeks*. He's the dirtiest, filthiest, scuzziest thing you ever did see. Wantin' me a badass love puppy and got me a slime doggy instead. He ain't even put together right down there.¹⁷ Always somethin' oozin' on out. Hell, he fills a damn chamber pot every night! There's the snorin' and the sniffin' and the gruntin' and the moanin' and the talkin' in his sleep. . . . [Y'all can't believe the state I'm in!]

CHARLOTTE

So swap that model! Trade him in!¹⁸

ANNA NICOLE

If I so much as go out dancin' in town—on a holiday, like people do—he blows his damn top. Storms in and makes a goddamn scene and then he beats the shit outta me. [I can't just take it on the chin!]

CINDY LOU

Y'all swap that model! Trade 'im in!

CHARLOTTE

Seriously. The way I see it, we're pretty easy on the eyes. It's only right that we get all dolled up every now and then, *n'est-ce pas?*¹⁹ If only to please our husbands. That's no sin!

ANNA NICOLE

Let's swap them models! Trade 'em in!

CINDY LOU

If I so much as mosey on over to the Good News Church, y'all, it ain't good news. Our Lady ain't never seen sorrow like mine! He's complainin' and complainin' if I buy me two candles to light. They don't cost so much. [It's Mother Mary: ain't no sin.]

CHARLOTTE

Let's swap! We'll trade all three of them in!

ANNA NICOLE

Yeah, well when *I* head out to the Church of the Holy Redeemer, he sends a goddamn escort after me! I got the valet and the maid up my ass the whole time. It's fuckin' church, for Chrissakes! It's not like I'm sneakin' off to get laid.

Or if I was, I don't remember.

[*Cindy Lou and Charlotte are ignoring her again.*]

I'm not makin' this shit up. I can't take it!

[It's horrible. I just can't win.]

CINDY LOU

Let's swap! We'll trade all three of 'em in!

CHARLOTTE

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.[®] If I happen to be a bit out of sorts when it's my time of the month, he makes fun of me. He thinks it's hysterical! Frankly, my dears, he doesn't give a damn. [*She makes the sign of the cross.*] Cross my heart and hope to die! Honestly, he'd rather see me dead so he can take up with one of those Protestant floozies.

Doesn't even matter how she looks. Pretty. Ugly. Pretty ugly. As long as she's dirty!²⁰ I swear to God: he'll do me in!²¹

ANNA NICOLE

Let's swap! We'll trade all three of 'em in!

CINDY LOU

And, every time I'm even near mine—y'all know what I'm talkin' about—in bed—he don't talk! Not one word! I'm right there, droppin' all sorts o' hints. [*She heaves an enormous sigh.*] Nothin'! Still cain't get a single word out of him. Hell, I ain't no damn martyr! I wrap myself around him, like so. He don't do nothin' but put up a fight. Poor, poor pitiful me![®] [I thought that we was kissin' kin.]

CHARLOTTE

Let's swap! We'll trade all three of them in!

ANNA NICOLE

Yeah, but the question is how.

CINDY LOU

I heard there's a dealer in these here parts.

[*Charlotte and Anna Nicole look at her quizzically.*]

Not *that* kinda dealer. A wheeler-dealer, a peddler, a travelin' salesman. A kinda horse-trader 'cept this one's a *husband* trader. Y'all know he'd be happy to help us out. Swap out our three crackers for three brand new models. Hot young studs. It's a swap meet—you know, to swap *meat*!

[Scene 3]

[*The Husband Trader makes his move.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

I'm at your service, ma'am. I do believe I've got just what you need right here. Get it for you wholesale. I got 'em in every shape and size. Hurry, hurry, while supplies last!

[*He focuses primarily on Cindy Lou, as he will throughout.*] Now, what can I show you today? Looking for anything in particular? See anything you like? Feel free to browse.

CHARLOTTE

[*Possibly with a curtsy, she studies the merchandise and the multiple bottles.*] *Monsieur*. [I can't say that I approve of human trafficking but, if you must know], I was thinking that what I might like would be a sweet little husband who's good and kind and honest. And who would keep his marriage vows. And who's not keeping an Ellie Mae or a Cindy Lou on the side. And who buys me whatever I need to warm me up and keep me going and keep the good old juices flowing. Any hour of the day or night. And, speaking of juices, I do like a good wine with my bread and cheese. An after-dinner drink. And plenty of the hard stuff too.²² That's what I'd like to have and to hold.

[*Anna Nicole pushes Charlotte out of the way and sidles up to the Husband Trader, who is still focused on Cindy Lou. She peppers her request with obscene gestures.*]

ANNA NICOLE

And, as for *moi*: I want one got a nice, soft touch. Really *aims* to please. A Johnny-on-the-spot who won't hold out on me. A real straight shooter. Gonna keep his end up. And keep *me* in the lap o' luxury. [*She looks witheringly at Cindy Lou.*] And, unlike *some*, all I want is for him to shut the fuck up and stick it in!²³ Not one single word in the sack! No muss, no fuss.

CINDY LOU

And, Lord have mercy! I might be a lady now but, if you're lookin' at me, you're lookin' at country![®] Only I do hear me a bunch o' things 'bout France. Ooh-la-la! C'est magnifique![®] Got them *monsieurs* know how to do—why I do believe I'm blushin'!—what them French do best, bless their hearts. [And I ain't talkin' 'bout just kissin'! Want me sweeter than honey but got me bitter as Gaul.]²⁴

[*The Husband Trader turns to Cindy Lou alone.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

Now that's a horse of a different color! Very well, madam, say no more. I understand. You want someone to fuck you. A well-hung stud. Quick on the trigger. Give you your money's worth.²⁵ Come-a, come-a, come-a, come-a, come, come. Yeah, yeah, yeah![®]

CHARLOTTE

Would you happen to have what I need?
[*There is no response from the Husband Trader, who is still paying rapt attention to Cindy Lou.*]
Monsieur? Hello? Are you my handyman?

The HUSBAND TRADER

[*To Cindy Lou*] Yes, ma'am.

ANNA NICOLE

So, show us what you got!

[In a comical ballet, the Husband Trader presents his inventory.²⁶ The First Specimen might be wearing a pathetic, tight-fitting blue tuxedo with a frilly shirt, his pants torn at the crotch.]

The HUSBAND TRADER

Got a real live one right here! *[He reaches for some castanets and encourages the specimen to dance some flamenco.]*²⁷

CINDY LOU

What *is* he wearin'? I do believe your pretty boy been on one hayride too many. He got no more moves. And what the heck's he scratchin'? He got lice up his nose?
[{To the Audience} Y'all, I know this is a flea market, but this is ridiculous!]

The HUSBAND TRADER

Why, that's merely due to the fact that I've got a couple o' monks scouting merchandise for me. They're the ones that put 'im together like that. But, if you please, ma'am, do have a closer look. *[All preowned stock, but in excellent used condition.]* You've got your two little buddies right here. . . . *[He notices, with horror, that one little buddy is not tucked away and hastily conceals it.]* Only two ears and a tail . . . will we hide from these dames, yes we will!^{©28} *[Give 'im a try! You'll have a ball!]*

CHARLOTTE

My goodness! He won't do at all!²⁹
Plus, he might be a redneck. Take him away! He's just a bum!

The HUSBAND TRADER

I promise, madam, he's not scum!
In fact, he's just your size. He's just a bit squeezed in is all.

ANNA NICOLE

My goodness! He won't do at all!

[The Husband Trader pushes forward the Germanic-looking Second Specimen. His clothes are so tight that he can hardly breathe, his exaggerated attributes literally bursting at the seams.]

The HUSBAND TRADER

[*To Cindy Lou alone*] How's about this one, honey? He ain't proud or uppity. He don't talk back. Plus, he really knows how to do-si-do! And allemande left, to your partner!³⁰ I tell you, he'll be on his knees for you in no time.

Go on, say "Guten Tag" to the lady! Show her your bratwurst! Up! Stand tall!

CINDY LOU

My goodness! He won't do at all.

[*He pushes the Third Specimen forward in preppy wear.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

[*To Cindy Lou*] How's about this one, honey? He's a good ol' boy. A fine, upstanding citizen. He ain't no whore chaser or wife beater neither. Look! Mr. Johnson fits right in. And this time, y'all, there's no stray ball!

CHARLOTTE

My goodness! He won't do at all!

And what, pray tell, is the trouble with his rectum? He seems to have sprung a leak.³¹

[*The Husband Trader hastily pushes the Fourth Specimen forward.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

How's about this pretty boy? Ten-hut! Always ready to rise to the occasion. Check it out! He's already hard as a rock! Got a real joy boner!³² That's right! He's at your beck and call!

ANNA NICOLE

My goodness! He won't do at all!

[*He pushes forward the Fifth Specimen, in military garb.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

All right, then, here you go! Check out soldier boy here! Got a real fire in his belly. And a bug up his ass. [*He makes a hasty move to delouse the specimen.*] He'll rush right into the fray. He's hot to trot! A fireball!

CHARLOTTE

My goodness! These won't do at all.

[*He pushes the Sixth Specimen forward, who is young, pale, diminutive, and dressed like an altar boy.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

What do you want? A choir boy? Do you double duty. Two for the price of one!³³ He'll hit the spot once and for all!

ANNA NICOLE

My goodness! These won't do at all.

[*The Husband Trader, still focused on Cindy Lou, now pushes forward a total of eleven more specimens.*]

The HUSBAND TRADER

[I can give you a great deal on some o' these floor models. Close-out prices.] You want a fine musician? He'll practice every day![®] Sure he's a golden oldie, but he'll come out and play.

How's about a poet to serenade you?

A sweet-talker, tell you whatever crap you wanna hear?

A locksmith or a hat maker?

A tailor or a kettle-maker?

A baker or a cobbler?

A mason or a carpenter?

[A walrus or a carpenter?

A butcher? A baker? A candlestick-maker?]

Take your pick: Help yourselves to whatever you like!

CINDY LOU

The lot of 'em won't do at all!

Mercy me! I reckon none o' them fellas gonna do the trick. Besides, I didn't say nothin' 'bout no blue collar.³⁴

The HUSBAND TRADER

Then I've got nothin' to swap! I don't seem to have a thing that suits you. Whichever husbands I propose, nothing appeals to you. [*Mimicking them*] "No, none of these will do at all!"

Long story short: go on and figure out how to break some other tie that binds but marriage ain't one of 'em. Once you're in, there's no trade-in.

CINDY LOU

It's true, y'all. At our age, we shouldn't oughta be changin' anyhow. It's true, y'all.

CHARLOTTE

As if we'd trust some stranger! It's all about the devil you know. It's better not to change.

ANNA NICOLE

Besides, everybody would make fun of us. So I mean, really: It's better not to change.

[*Doubled version in verse begins here.*]

[The HUSBAND TRADER

Long story short:³⁵

You can change a horse, you can change a carriage,

But there ain't no way you can change a marriage!

In the end, I've got nothing to exchange.

Not a single man here is in your size.

Turned your noses up at my merchandise!³⁶

It seems clear you don't really want to change.

Go trade something else if you rearrange

Because, in this life, you can't swap out marriage.

CINDY LOU

Mercy me, that's right. You all know the adage.
Plus we're at that age where you don't exchange.
In the end, that's right: let's not ch-ch-change.®

CHARLOTTE

Why believe some salesman? He's kind of strange.
What's the point? Don't go for a ch-ch-change.®

ANNA NICOLE

[To the Audience, indicating that it is time to pass the hat for financial contributions] If you laughed, then maybe you got spare change?
What I mean is: Don't go for ch-ch-change.®
So bye-bye for now! Gonna soon be gone.
But, to send you off, how's about a song?

*[Possible closing music]*³⁷

The END

11.

Extreme Husband Makeover, or,

Lost and Foundry

Les Femmes qui font refondre leurs maris

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CALVIN (Thibault)

JENNY, Calvin's Wife (Jennette)

EBENEZER (Collart)

PENNY, Ebenezer's Wife (Pernette)

The BELL-MAKER, SMITTY BLACK, the Great Rejuvenator (Le
Fondeur de Cloches)

[The Chambermaid of Ebenezer and Penny]

[Several Extras to fill out the marketplace, if need be]

PRODUCTION NOTES

The *Farce nouvelle à cinq personnages des femmes qui font refondre leurs maris*, #6 in the *Recueil du British Museum*, appears in Viollet le Duc, *ATF*, 1: 63–93 (without verse numbers); and as #38 in Tissier, *RF*, 6: 113–82. It is described in Faivre, *Répertoire*, #54 (156–57); and Petit de Julleville, *RTC*, #101 (135). This anonymous play was also translated into modern French by Tissier as #33 in *FFMA*, 2: 111–33. To my knowledge, there is no English translation. Per Petit de Julleville, it is 608 mostly octosyllabic verses with some decasyllabic interludes (*RTC*, 135) and 611 verses for both Faivre and Tissier.

While evidence of late medieval and Renaissance performance remains elusive, Tissier lists a number of nineteenth and twentieth-century adaptations, some of which found their way to the stage (*RF*, 6: 117–18).

Plot

The problem, in a word, is sex. Rather, it's *no* sex. Impotence.

The solution, in a word, is a medieval theater of the absurd at its very best. A fascinating farce of tremendous poetic, iconographic, psychological, and philosophical complexity, *Extreme Husband Makeover* reprises the spouse-swap motif but develops it in a highly original way. Doubling down on all the doubling of #8, *Bitches and Pussycats* and #9, *Wife Swap*—or the tripling of #10, *Husband Swap*—*Extreme Husband Makeover* takes up the issue of change only to take the women down. Although Faivre complained anew of another clunky and laborious “demonstration” (*Répertoire*, 157; 276), the mirror-image layout of crosscut scenes from two marriages speaks eloquently to the whole point of the play. There are two sides to every story, and two sides to every coin, man, woman, everyman, and everywoman; but it's impossible to find both in one and the same life mate. All spouses are destined to negotiate, as best they can, the (un)happy medium between animal passion and affective harmony. With an almost Jekyll and Hyde premise expressed with uncommon lyrical beauty, doubling is the medium and the message.

If all that strikes you as way too rhapsodic for farce, it suffices to visualize Bruno Barreto's magnificent 1976 farce for the silver screen, *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*. There, another bride is torn between her physical attraction to a sexy but abusive adulterer and her emotional attraction to an unexciting but attentive gentleman. In love and marriage, it's always two for the price of one; and, by the end of *Extreme Husband Makeover*, Jenny and Penny will have looked at marriage from both sides now. They really don't know love at all.[©]

We first meet the two wives during two lengthy expositions in which they reveal the root of their problem to their husbands by means of two games of Twenty Questions.¹ Like the three wives of #10, *Husband Swap*, Jenny and Penny deem that they could do better. (If that phrase reminds you of Nicole Kidman in *The Stepford Wives* [2004], good show!) Whether the origin of their distress be Jenny's fortyish Calvin or Penny's seventyish Ebenezer, the women are unable to overlook a serious omission from their otherwise comfortable lifestyles. They're not gettin' any. And that is the bone[r] of contention that sets everything else in motion.

Enter a craftsman who appears to be the answer to their prayers (Scene 3). He is not the husband-swapping handyman of our previous play but a smooth-talking artisan who plies a very particular trade. Kin to his sleazy brother in

#3, *Pots and Scams*, he repairs pots, pans, and kettles; but he also brings something unique to the table. He is a *fondeur de cloches* or Bell-Maker, which is a profession requiring immense expertise and which here incarnates farce's unique penchant for melding metaphor with literalism. That's right. In what hardly qualifies as a ringing endorsement of marriage, he fashions bells. And then some. He refashions *husbands*. With stunning dramatic realism and *unrealism*, he does this by popping the raw marital material into his oven, melting men down, remolding them, and unmolding the finished product. Thank you, Stephen Greenblatt, he practices Renaissance *bell*-fashioning. As we shall see, when such a discerning reader of farce as Walter Kerr zeroed in on the puffery of farce, even he didn't know how right he was. Kerr remarked that "farce puffs itself up to the greatest possible proportions, somewhere just short of bursting with the effort, and in doing so it makes room for every sort of effect: it can inhale lyric beauty, a degree of kindliness, even tears if it cares to, because its lungs are so powerful and because all of these other things can be properly proportioned in a ballooning so vast" (*Tragedy and Comedy*, 312). When *Extreme Husband Makeover* fans the smoldering flames of female sexual frustration, it blusters and bellows with literal bellows.

After a marvelous powwow (Scene 4) in which the two female BFFs puzzle over what to do about the dead meat at home, Jenny and Penny resolve to find a Mister Fix-It and, in one of the more realistic elements of the plot, they propose to have recourse to a practitioner whose vocation is familiar to them from everyday life. Surprisingly for farce, however, their desire for male metamorphosis is an unreasonable proposition. Up until the transformation, the two husbands are among the kindest men of the entire farcical repertoire. Both are fully cognizant of—nay, apologetic for—their principal defect: an inability to perform in the "game of love" (*amoureux desduict* for Calvin [*ATF*, 1: 66] and *jeux d'amours* for Ebenezer [1: 70]). With habitual wifely wile, Jenny and Penny easily coax Calvin and Ebenezer into essentially instantaneous consent; and the die is cast.² Nor do the services come cheap. The Bell-Maker's opening bid is a staggering 100 *écus*, which I've rendered as \$10,000 *each* (1: 79). But Colin and Ebenezer are not financially well-off for nothing. They're excellent negotiators who are able to talk the specialist down to the bargain of a mere \$5K a pop. Needless to say, two for the price of one turns out to be no bargain for the women.

Notwithstanding the Bell-Maker's ominous admonitions in an almost Pilate-like moment (1: 81), Jenny and Penny reject a last opportunity to change their minds. So he pops the two husbands into his magic oven as the

wives eagerly assist, literally huffing and puffing until—and there’s the moral of their story—they blow their own houses down. After quite some time in the oven, Calvin and Ebenezer emerge young and studly, having “walked across the fire”[©] for Jenny and Penny. They also emerge, nasty, stingy, and brutal, to retake control of the purse strings. Whereas Cindy Lou, Charlotte, and Anna Nicole of #10, *Husband Swap* were smart enough to realize that, sometimes, it’s a far, far better thing not to go a for ch-ch-change,[©] Jenny and Penny are not. In a denouement that is more tragic than comic, the two husbands who started off “whipped” become “whippers” while, to borrow the turn of phrase from Leon Guilhamet, the wives are essentially “stripped and whipped” (*Satire*, 8; *FF*, 28). Having started out at half-staff, Colin and Ebenezer brandish newly functional staffs—and sticks too—for menacing and beating their wives, who are now more dissatisfied than ever. It’s not even clear whether the women will get the sex they so craved or, if they do, whether it will be violently imposed by two newly minted brutes.

Caught completely off guard by their downfall, the two wretched wives return to the Bell-Maker for a makeover do-over, but to no avail. Not even their prior powers of seduction come in handy. It’s too late. This is farce: it’s always too late. Once the bell tolls for a contemporary audience, the moral of a medieval fable is clear, present, dangerous, and classic farce. Any one of these aphorisms will do:

Be careful what you wish for, it might come true.

Caveat emptor: if the customer is always right, satisfaction is by no means guaranteed.

Never trust a sure thing, especially when a snake-oil salesman tells you to beware.

Ladies, if you’ve got a good man at home who meets your material needs, then be a material girl[©] and don’t you fret about the raw material, lest you wind up with nothing.

Count your lucky stars, count your money, and be happy with what you’ve got—even if that means no sex for you!

Despite some token closing advice that husbands should rule with a gentle hand, the dark, misogynistic message of the play is that a naturally sweet man—yes, there *is* such a thing—is corrupted by a demanding, ungrateful, sex-crazed woman, who brings out the worst in him. In farce, *she* is the biggest loser and, speaking of which. . . . To modernize and contextualize this play, one need look no further than ABC’s franchise of makeover program-

ming: *Wife Swap*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (hosted by Ty Pennington), and *Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition*, aka *Extreme Weight Loss* (hosted by Chris Powell). Too transitory, you say? Even the ephemera of popular culture are now immortal thanks to the Internet.

So what does it all mean?

For Faivre, the new, domiciliary world order results from the men's discovery of a "fountain of youth" (*Répertoire*, 157). But, when she sells Ebenezer on the whole idea (1 :76), even Penny doesn't use the term *fontaine de jouvence*, which, by the way, is the title of another farce: *Extreme Husband Makeover* is a song of fire, not (melted) ice.³ To go along with Faivre would be to mix metaphors in a play that is at pains to literalize them. It makes more sense to say that, once upon a time, Jenny and Penny were all fired up but, when all is said and done, they're in a marital hell full of fire and brimstone. The nefarious consequences of seeking change are "ejaculated," as it were, in a manner as unflinching as the beatings to which the women are ultimately subjected: try to put your marital buns in the oven, and it will serve you right. Modification is commodification. Indeed, everything comes together in the play's central symbol as plot, characters, language, sets, staging, and props forge a special brand of comedy from a favorite Middle French proverb.

Although the play features a large number of bell-related idioms (below, § "Language"), no interpretation can proceed without an understanding of *être étonné*, *être penaud comme un fondeur de cloches*, which means "to be extremely surprised" or "as dumbfounded as a Bell-Maker" (in his *foundry*). In a superb etymological analysis drawn from history and folklore, Quitard explains that "melting a bell is a serious operation requiring much preparation" as well as time, care, money, and expertise (*Dictionnaire Etymologique*, 236). Given the high failure rates at removing a finished bell from its mold, the idiom came to connote overconfidence. As early as the sixteenth century, it evoked the person who was dumbstruck at having missed out on what seemed a sure thing, someone who was the recipient of unfortunate, unanticipated payback (Oudin, *Curiositez*, 202), or someone who suffered a mishap.⁴ Moreover, if anyone is struck dumb with surprise in our play, it is not the experienced and clairvoyant Smitty but the two dumbed-down women. Imagine, suggests Quitard, the shock and disappointment of the bell-maker whose painstaking efforts have been for naught. "We find records of several bell-makers," he observes, such as Jean Masson of Rouen, alias George d'Amboise, "who died from the pain of not having succeeded in their work; there are also records of those who died from the joy of hav-

ing succeeded" (*Dictionnaire Etymologique*, 236–37). Farce prefers that people die laughing.

Characters and Character Development

As in #8, *Bitches and Pussycats* and #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, we encounter two couples in counterpoint: Calvin and Jenny (Thibault and Jennette) and Ebenezer and Penny (Collart and Pernette). In these dramaturgical notes, we shall move from couple to couple, making their acquaintance first as men and husbands, next as women and wives, and, last and maybe least, as individuals. Individuality is not exactly the point of the play's exemplars.

Good neighbors Jenny and Penny are best friends, as are Calvin and Ebenezer. Both couples are well-to-do, with lots of extra cash to throw around. While the source of their wealth is unclear, the method is clear as a bell. The two gents drive quite the hard bargain (as with the Bell-Maker). They're good Christians about the whole thing, though, taking the time here and there to give thanks unto the Lord for their good fortune. They are even courteous to the Bell-Maker, whom they immediately peg for a charlatan, addressing him with the polite *vous* in their interactions. For the rest, Calvin and Ebenezer are elderly, relatively infirm, and in a state almost as sorry as the Husband Trader's motley assortment from #10, *Husband Swap*. They are sorry husbands indeed, a point hammered in by wordplay that we have seen before on *mary* ("husband") and *marye* ("sorry"). In light of the women's descriptions, I might have dubbed one "Sleepy" or "Sneezy" and the other, "Grumpy," but, their names translate better into English like so: Thibault's name derives from the Germanic "Theobold" (one part baldness, the other part boldness, the latter surely as ironic as it was when Saint Thibault of Provins refused to lead troops into battle). Our Thibault thus sports the fittingly old-school moniker of "Calvin," which preserves both his baldness (*calvitie*) and any derisiveness about his boldness. As for Collart, whose name sounds fairly bilious (from *colle* for "bile"), he is "Ebenezer," which channels the old codger's contumely very nicely, thank you, conjuring visions of Mr. Magoo (especially as Scrooge in the animated *Christmas Carol* [1962]). Francophiles might even rebaptize the intestinally challenged Collart as "Alceste" if they so wish, in honor of Molière's famous *atrabilaire* from the *Misanthrope*.⁵ With all that bile, Ebenezer is the embodiment of the play's multiple allusions to the four bodily humors: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. Onomasti-

cally, these apply to Thibault too in that boldness, however ironic, is a character trait of yellow bile.

The curtain goes up on a domestic scene that is much like that of *The Farce of the Fart* between Hubert and Jehannette (*FF*, #1). Calvin is yelling for his Jenny. He is rather nicer about issuing marching orders than Hubert of the *Fart*, possibly owing to his enormous needs for assistance with his person. He is hard of hearing and so portly, clumsy, and awkward that he can barely dress himself. Impotence may be the least of Calvin's worries.

Meanwhile, things are even worse for Penny with Ebenezer. She rattles off a bill of particulars reminiscent of Cindy Lou's in #10, *Husband Swap*; and, since he appears to summon her for his most intimate ablutions, one can only wonder about the kind of *accidens* she is obliged to clean up (1: 68). If, by nature, Ebenezer is more agitated and edgier than Calvin—his infirmities clearly render him a bit more impatient—he is, at the same time, remarkably solicitous of Penny when trying to get to the bottom of what's wrong. Also, he has never laid a hand on his wife (for better or for worse), and she does not contradict him on that point. He likes to speak in proverbs, buttressing his inquiry with conventional wisdom.

Although there is no doubt that Calvin and Ebenezer are ripe for the gerontologist, their exact ages are unknown. Even so, the text gives many a clue. Brace yourself for an algebra problem. We know that Ebenezer is twenty years older than Calvin—so says Calvin, anyway—whereas Penny says that Ebenezer is forty years older than she (1: 76). Faivre calculates that Calvin is about forty years old and Ebenezer sixty (*Répertoire*, 157); so if Penny is twenty, then, okay, Ebenezer would be sixty. However, these calculations originate in an ambiguous statement allegedly made by Calvin: *De soixante ans tourner à vingt / Ce seroit un souverain bien* (1: 77). It doubtless signifies “to go from sixty back to twenty would be an amazing thing” (see note 24), but here's the hitch: Is this a comment from the vantage point of speaker Calvin's own sixty years? Or a word of encouragement to a sixty-year-old Ebenezer that *Ebenezer's* rejuvenation is more pressing than his own? You decide. Furthermore, Faivre is probably right that Ebenezer is sixty and Calvin forty; but updated staging might easily imply updated life span. It could be very funny to make Calvin sixty and Ebenezer eighty, with both—alas—born way too soon to avail themselves of the miracle of Viagra.

Initially, what sets Calvin and Ebenezer apart is that they are both generous to a fault. Both have bestowed material wealth upon their wives and plenty of material too, as in bolt upon bolt of lovely fabric for fashioning dresses.

Ebenezer even seems to have been driven by love when he picked Penny. In Scene 2, he dares share that he received only a very paltry dowry when other prospective fathers-in-law had promised a windfall (1: 68). Money can't buy him love.⁶ Mind you, the gents' generosity doesn't stop them from heckling, hassling, and hectoring the ladies: don't talk so much, quit running wild, get me this, fetch me that. (Compare their needs with Dummy Downer's repeated requests of Frigid Bridget in sc. 2 of *Playing Doctor* [FF, 200–204].) But there are numerous glimpses of genuine empathy for Jenny and Penny, which is downright astonishing for farce.

Scarcely blind to their own inadequacies, Calvin and Ebenezer feel guilty about being unable to respond to their wives' sexual needs. Or do they? Is their enthusiasm for the makeover real or feigned? As we shall see in Scenes 5 and 6, the actors' inflection will determine whether the true sentiment is "I'll be there with bells on" or "Let's get this the bell over with!" And what about their hasty consent to the procedure? On one hand, empathy explains their indulgence. On the other hand, both men try to get their wives to swallow the line that a chaste and virtuous life is a good life. Grin and bear it, they say. But they won't bare it; and only the audience will grin at what the women will inevitably bear.

So much for the men.

If the male roles are exceptionally complex, the female roles are all the more cookie-cutter caricatures. Between their sound-alike names and sound-alike talk, it can be tough to tell Jenny and Penny apart. In a way, they are two of a kind: parvenues of the social climber kind. Both speak frankly and with considerably more vulgarity than their spouses; both reveal a soubrette-like tendency to speak directly to the audience (which I often cue here by a line break).

Jenny is a stylish fashion plate—the text alludes several times to another sort of raw material, namely, the textiles on hand for her elegant wardrobe—and she's definitely used to getting her way. Like Jehannette in *The Farce of the Fart* and Jenny in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*, she is stubborn as a jenny, particularly when Calvin seeks a beast of burden.

For her own part, Penny seems at first to be a carbon copy of Jenny, her primary dramatic function reduced to echolalia. But that is not the case. Penny is somewhat sassier than her BFF when speaking to her husband. And her sexuality is pretty much in your face. Maybe in Jenny's face too. I've gone so far as to tease out a homoerotic subtext in which Penny could volunteer to help Jenny out with all that unrequited physical desire. Penny is also an able

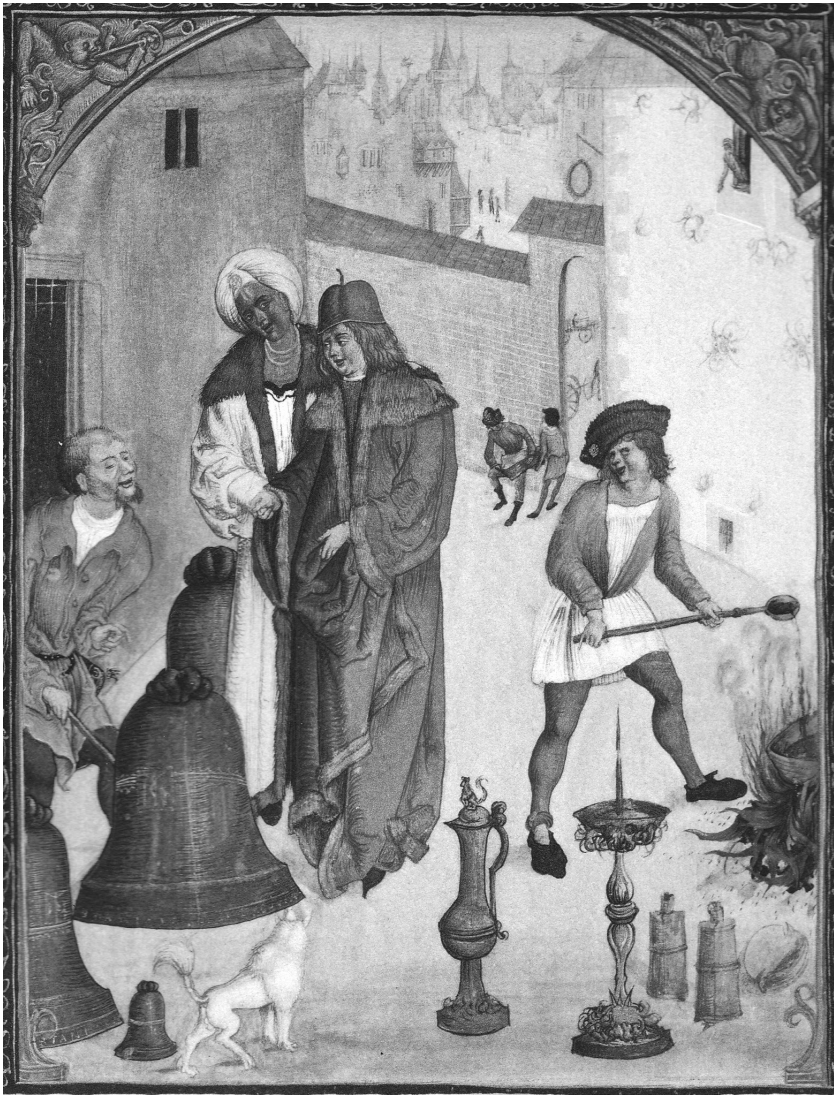


Figure 5. Bell-maker. Miniature from the *Krakauer Behaim-Codex*.
Reproduced in Henry Ronot, *Dictionnaire des Fondateurs de Cloches*, 17.

liar and ably creative fantasizer. For example, when cajoling Ebenezer into the medieval equivalent of plastic surgery, she fabricates a string of facts not in evidence about the Bell-Maker's past successes. Plus, we can intuit something else from the women's urgent gossip sessions. Penny always comes to Jenny; so she might likewise have come from more humble origins. When

she makes her first entrance, she claims to have been picking cabbage in the vegetable garden (1: 67).⁶ Dirtying one's hands would be servants' work (as Jenny notes in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*, Scene 1). Too much cabbage, moreover, might clue us in to Ebenezer's digestive issues. She who troubleth her own house shall inherit the wind.

And now, for the grand conundrum: what to do with the *fondeur de cloches*, whose profession must be decipherable in the twenty-first century, an era when bell-making is no longer part of the commercial landscape. (An image of one from days gone by appears in Figure 5.) In many ways, this Great Rejuvenator is the main character of the play. Certainly, he delivers some of its more meaningful lyrical moments. But, with the exception of living-history museums, his lost art no longer resonates today. "Bellfounders" toiling in the "foundry" are unknown quantities. By the same token, "molders," "forgers," or "casters" are unlikely to ring any bells; and, obviously, "bellman" is out. Staging will be decisive when bringing to life the man and his work. But so too will a happily identifiable piece of Americana: a blacksmith. I christen the unnamed protagonist of *Extreme Husband Makeover* Smitty Black.

Like our earlier Kettle-Maker of #3, *Pots and Scams*, Smitty goes in for long-winded sales pitches; and, like the Husband Trader of our previous farce, this tradesman plies his trade in *men*. Smitty Black-of-all-trades is a kettle-maker, a smith, and a bellfounder all rolled into one. He is also an expert in reverse psychology. Either that or he's the worst salesman ever because, after touting his reputation enough to persuade Jenny and Penny to make their husbands over, he then commits fervently to dissuading them from the expensive purchase. More unusual still is Smitty's empathy for Calvin and Ebenezer, which belies an emotional depth that is almost unheard of in farce. He could almost be played as a tragic figure, condemned, for whatever reason, to the flesh trade.

Language

In addition to the "surprised as a Bell-Maker" proverb cited above (§ "Plot"), other pieces of proverbial wisdom would have been ringing in the ears of the audiences of *Extreme Husband Makeover*. The equivalent of a "big cheese" was a "big bell" (*grosse cloche*); and certain noblemen were called *gentils-hommes* or *noblesse de la cloche* ("nobility of the bell"). (The latter epithet applied to the descendants of town administrators, who were habitually summoned to meetings by the ceremonial sounding of bells.) Elsewhere in

popular culture, the expression *n'être pas sujet au coup de cloche* referred to individuals who were free from servitude: unlike household servants, they were not at the beck and call of the master's ring of a bell. And *cloche* was the term for a blister resulting from manual labor or, say, from a burn from an oven. And that's only the beginning.

In his youth, Rabelais's Gargantua "took the great bells of Notre Dame Church" to hang around his mare's neck (*Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 42–43), much as an American farmer would do with a cowbell for "Bossie." But bells are also rife with theological overtones. In an interesting if obscure work on the history of bell-making, Henry Ronot conducted extensive archival research that led him to assert that the shelf life—belfry life?—of a medieval bell rarely surpassed two centuries. Beyond being subject to overuse and accidents, bells were rung overzealously, he maintains, by energized Reformers (17). In other words, when Protestant ringers took to the bell towers during the Reformation, they had a mission. It involved breaking the Catholic Church's bells.

From the realm of law and parliamentary procedure, another French proverb goes like this: *Qui n'entend qu'une cloche, n'entend qu'un son*, literally, "he who hears but one bell hears but one sound." A bit like the sound of one hand clapping, that one means that adjudication necessitates listening to both parties: one bell is but one voice and one side of the story. Yet another expression is *c'est le son des cloches, auxquelles on fait dire tout ce qu'on veut*, or "the sound of a bell can mean anything." It mockingly denoted a propensity toward unreflective repetition of the so-called sagacity of others; it also connoted a certain openness to interpretation. Consistent with the play's meditation on the inability to have and to hold two husbands in one, medieval French people were wont to say too that *on ne peut sonner les cloches et aller à la procession*, "you can't sound the bells *and* go to the parade." (Unless it's a farcical parade, I guess, or a procession like the one in Scene 2 of #7, *Holy Deadlock*.) And yet one more expression, directly related to the events of *Extreme Husband Makeover*, was *il est temps de fondre la cloche*, as in, "it's time to melt the bell" or, figuratively, to resolve, at long last, an ongoing, persistent, festering affair. For Jenny and Penny, "melting the bell" is, of course, precisely what they hope to accomplish for their sexless marriages.

Since the key prop is Smitty's magic oven, I emphasize the culinary dimensions of the Bell-Maker's activities: grilling, barbecuing, and getting the husbands' buns in the oven. Mostly, though, I echo our farce's intricate word-play with as many bell metaphors, idioms, songs, and subtexts as possible. As might be expected, the original Middle French boasts multiple foundry-

generated puns: bell-finishing yields *fin* (“fine” or “clever”) and *refiner* (“refine,” “refinish,” or “finish off”); *confondu* is translated as both “confused” and “melted completely”; *chauld* or “hot” goes with *ne m’en chault* or “I don’t care”; and the fabulous *sonner mot* is how the French say “don’t breathe a word” (as in “don’t *ring* a word”). Another linguistic aspect, related to versification, is intriguing by its absence. Given that the verbs for “melting down” are the crux of the dramatic action, it is curious that *fondre* and *refondre* so rarely form part of an attention-grabbing rhyming couplet. It happens only twice: once during the “meltdown” (1: 82) and again just after the makeover (1: 87). Both times, *fondre* and *refondre* rhyme with *respondre* (“to answer”). Soon enough, Jenny and Penny will dare not talk back.

On the lighter side, some of the interactions recall Lewis Carroll’s “You are old, Father William,” so I make use of snippets every now and then. But, what with the enduring influence of Edgar Allan Poe, there was much to be made of “The Bells,” excerpts from which would work perfectly as a prologue or preface to performance. But, on the whole, the linguistic sonority required adaptation. For instance, I have rejected some of the highly technical metallurgical terms as way too specialized in favor of our more familiar heavy metals (which might eventually be pounded out by rock music of that genre). And we can forget about the distinction between a blacksmith and a whitesmith, the latter of whom works in cold metals only. If contemporary audiences are to laugh, they must be able to recognize the metals in question without having to consult the periodic table. Once the technology of bell-founding has been established, other terminology should be more and more comprehensible: welding, forging, drawing, shrinking, bending, upsetting, punching, and, in light of the farcical predilection for metacommentary, *casting* and *recasting*.

A final problem faced by the translator is fundamental to the play: the particulars of the agreed-upon price for the makeover. Five types of coin appear in *Extreme Husband Makeover*: *deniers*, *ducats*, *écus*, *francs*, and *livres*. In Scene 4, for example, Penny speculates that one *écu* might do the trick, and Jenny seconds her motion with two *ducats* (1: 75), which would seem to provide additional testimony to her being financially better off than her friend. In Scene 5, Ebenezer ventures that he’s in, even if the fee is on the order of 100 *francs* (1: 76). And, in Scene 8, Smitty Black asks for the exorbitant sum of 100 *écus* apiece (1: 79), with Jenny interjecting later that the group will be paying for the services in *beaulx ducatz* (1: 84), which I take to mean *gold ducats*.

Clearly, everybody would make very poor contestants on *The Price Is Right*.

Ebenezer is off, and the ladies are way off. Nor is that the first failure of communication in the economy of love. Earlier, Ebenezer had complained that all he got for a dowry was twenty *livres* when, had he chosen a different wife, he could have gotten more than a thousand. Tissier suspects a copyist's tendency toward hyperbole and revises some of the numbers downward, here, by a factor of ten, to a hundred (*RF*, 6: 138n; below, note 18). But which is right and, more to the point, which is funnier?

In this tale of two couples, to understand money is to understand character. If the women are confused (*confondues*) about finances, their savvy spouses hammer out a deal for two makeovers for the price of one. Then, when it's time to pay the piper, they switch from *écus* to *ducats*, probably euchring the Bell-Maker out of half his fee and pulling off the medieval flim-flam of the century. As noted above, the shifting values of medieval currency conversion—*écus au soleil* or *écus ordinaires*? silver versus gold *ducats*?—is further muddled by the shiftiness of the characters. And, as I have done throughout, I convert the prices into USD in accordance with the model detailed in "About This Translation": a gold *ducat* will be worth about \$200, an *écu* roughly \$100, a *franc* or *livre*, about \$20, and a *denier*, about a dime. But, drawing inspiration from Ebenezer's objection to Smitty's "highway robbery" (1: 79), I submit that much of the medieval humor might well lie in all the gross overestimations, underestimations, and, you should pardon the expression, "misunderestimations." In *Extreme Husband Makeover*, calculation and miscalculation are, literally, a big deal.

Sets and Staging

Three sets are needed: two represent each couple's home, and the third Smitty Black's spot at market near his foundry. From the script, we know that Calvin and Jenny live on a large estate, apparently grander than that of their friends. It might include a vineyard and be situated stage left. Ebenezer and Penny's place, stage right, has a vegetable garden that might occupy a space downstage between the two properties. The Bell-Maker's magic oven should be center stage.

Starting with the more simple elements and proceeding to the more complex: we can intuit from the text that the curtain goes up in the cold light of day. This is of a piece with Penny being in the vegetable garden and with Ebenezer's presumably midday "dinner" invitation to Calvin (Scene 2). Jenny

claims at the end of Scene 1 that she is headed over to Penny's, so it makes sense to have her pass the Bell-Maker and hear part of his spiel (Scene 3), which, likewise, would normally be made in daylight. But Jenny never makes it all the way to Penny's since, in Scene 4, Penny comes to her place. Considering the level of feminine frustration, one or both women might linger along the way over something—or *someone* (a prostitute of either sex?)—eventually declining to succumb to his or her charms. That said, Smitty might be staged “out of time,” as if in a bell jar, a kind of omniscient narrator primarily interested in speaking to the audience. He might also be present onstage before his official entrance, eavesdropping at the couples' homes (like the Husband Trader of #10, *Husband Swap*), the better to market targeted services.

A second issue of time invites a dramaturgical choice between funny and funnier. Take the two domestic scenes of sexual inaction and the two powwows between Jenny and Penny. At what hour of the day—or night—do these take place? After rushing over to Jenny's, Penny growls that DH has been out like a light *depuis le soir* (1: 74). But what time did hubby go down? 5 P.M.? Could Penny be visiting Jenny at, say 11 A.M. the next morning, with the tired old Ebenezer still in bed? For my money, the play's zaniness profits from setting the women's first conversation in the middle of the night. I recommend that, prior to Scene 4, the two women be staged in pantomime giving seduction one last try. When their efforts fail once again, it's the last straw, such that it prompts an emergency, late-night gossip session. The nighttime is the right time[®] for persuading a sleepy old fart to consent to a costly makeover.

Subsequent to the makeover, a third issue concerns the vicious physical violence of Scenes 9–12. I stress anew the hyperreality and overacting of a *comédie-ballet*, in order to spotlight both the untenable realities of domestic abuse and a scenographic means by which to rebel against them. I've resorted to the play's own techniques by doubling, doubling, toiling, and troubling these already troubling moments (with prose, then poetry) and in such a way as to harness the agency of modern actresses, with which they might retrofit their embattled medieval forebears.

From the plausibly believable to the patently unbelievable, the staging of *Extreme Husband Makeover* next demands the suspension of disbelief par excellence as it pertains to the fungibility of time. At one point, Jenny protests that the two husbands have been in the oven for “over an hour” (1: 84). Even if we count all the blowing, blustering, and bellowing, it is evident that the actual *scene* cannot last that long. (Clocking in at more than six hundred



Figure 6. Bell-maker's symbolic costume. Drawing (seventeenth century) by Nicolas de Larmessin, *L'Arcimboldo dei mestieri*.

verses, *Extreme Husband Makeover* is fairly drawn out as it is. Besides, it's a farce, not an epic Passion play.) One scenario might rely on rapid freeze-frames to create the impression of time-lapse photography onstage. Another would set the action in the winter of the couples' discontent: if Calvin and Ebenezer enter the oven sometime before dusk, it could be very beautiful to stage their transformation in the glowing furnace against faltering daylight. But, all in all, it is their extensive sojourn in the oven that signals an almost insurmountable challenge to mounting the play today.

We have encountered vicious domestic violence before in farce, as we do here; and I have previously suggested the hyperreality of *comédie-ballet*, as I do here. But there is nothing quite like the potentially comedy-killing dangers of that all-important third set: the foundry's oven. What does it look like? And is the lovely symbolism of something like Figure 6 enough to capture it?

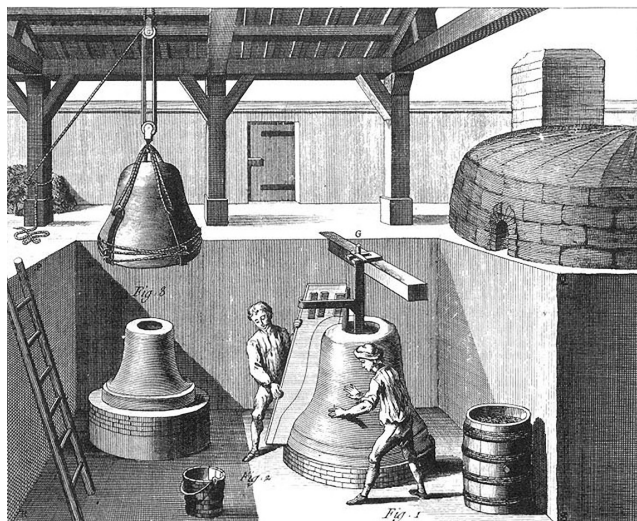


Figure 7. “Bell Casting: Manufacture of Molds.” From “Fonte des cloches,” Diderot and D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, vol. 5, Plate II.

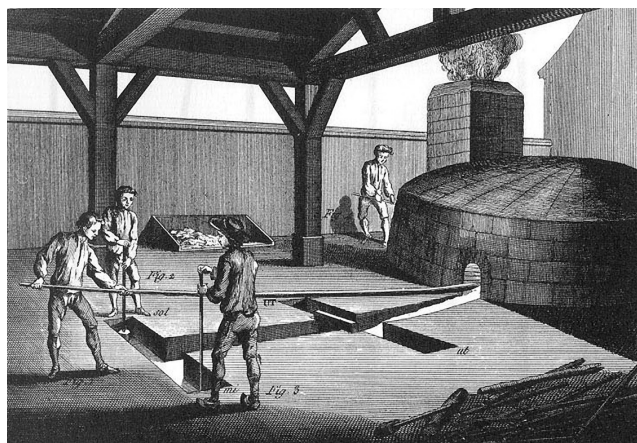


Figure 8. “Bell Casting: Operation of Casting.” From “Fonte des cloches,” Diderot and D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, vol. 5, Plate VI.

Some idea of its appearance, albeit from a later period, is available in the Enlightenment masterwork the *Encyclopédie* (Figures 7 and 8). And, scenographically, it is useful to picture a medieval Hell Mouth (Figure 9), the fiery furnace from the retributive biblical tale of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,⁷ or even the ominous device in which Jeff Goldblum is transformed



Figure 9. A Hell Mouth. From *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves: Hours and Masses for the Seven Days of the Week* (1440). Pierpont Morgan Library. MSS M.917, p. 180–M.945, fol. 97r.

into “the fly” in David Cronenberg’s dark cinematic masterpiece (1986). Or does one go with a toy, like an Easy-Bake Oven from the 1960s? Whatever the set design, it is no exaggeration to state that the oven threatens the play’s postmedieval survival. I’ll put the matter squarely, knowing full well that I cannot unring this bell:

In its compelling dramatization of the tension between symbolic literalism and literal symbolism, *Extreme Husband Makeover* calls for the placement inside a chamber of living, breathing, human beings. In the modern age, it seems inconceivable that two men could be ushered into an oven without conjuring visions of the Holocaust. It seems equally inconceivable that, when they emerge hideous, barbaric, burned to a crisp, and blackened, that their revised physical appearance could track as anything other than a racist lynching. The ludic chiaroscuro of light and dark is the essence of this farce; and contextualizing its violence is as paramount as *decontextualizing*

it (*MTOC*, 6–9). Thus, the director’s vision and the actors’ performances will determine the extent to which comedy is snuffed out or somehow resurrected, the latter nonetheless possible. Recall, for instance, that Eddie Izzard and Louis C. K. have both achieved stunning success with hilarious jokes about Hitler and anti-Semitism. Still, I have never heard a successful joke about lynching. (Nor do I ever hope to hear one.⁸) Comedy does not necessarily equal tragedy plus time; it might, however, equal tragedy plus timing.

Costumes and Props

Calvin and Jenny’s place is bursting at the seams with bolts of high-end fabric. Their chef’s kitchen is decked out with Le Creuset and copper pots; but throughout their dwelling, there are also chamber pots in various states of use and abuse. At Ebenezer and Penny’s place, the kitchen is a mess, with vegetable peels hither and yon.

One of the more amusing choices to be made revolves around the form of all the cold, hard cash. Do the men carry around wads of cash? Huge purses of coins? Checkbooks? And where do the women stash *their* cash? And, if you like one of my stage directions in Scene 8, Penny needs some Pringles.

At market, at the atelier, at the foundry’s oven, furnace, or kiln, Smitty is well equipped with legal documents and bookkeeping registers. He has in abundance pots, pans, cauldrons, and kettles; hammers, mallets, bellows, and burnishing equipment; items for cleanup (brooms, dustpans, mops); a large assortment of bells in every shape and size; and an enormous timer (maybe a school bell of the sort that rings between classes).

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

“God Bless America.” By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 370029559.

“This Land Is Your Land.” By Woody Guthrie. BMI Work #1502028.

“Hammer Song” (“If I Had a Hammer”). By Lee Hays and Pete Seeger.

BMI Work #519188.

“We’re Off to See the Wizard.” By Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg.

ASCAP Work ID: 530031555.

“The Heat Is On.” By Harold Faltermeyer and Keith Forsey. ASCAP Work ID: 380264311.

“Disco Inferno.” By Leroy Green and Tyrone Kersey. BMI Work #306148.

“Money Makes the World Go Round.” By Fred Ebb and John Kander.
 BMI Work #2592542.

“I Love You Just the Way You Are.” By Billy Joel. ASCAP Work
 ID: 400073952.

“None of Your Business.” By Herby Azor. ASCAP Work ID: 440216179.

“Master of the House.” By Alain Boublil, Jean-Marc Natel, and Claude-
 Michel Schönberg; Herbert Kretzmer. ASCAP Work ID:
 430378497.

“Breaking Up Is Hard to Do.” By Howard Greenfield and Neil Sedaka.
 BMI Work #148908.

“Big Spender.” By Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields. ASCAP Work
 ID: 320137955.

“Smalltown.” [“Small Town.”] By John Mellencamp. ASCAP Work
 ID: 490564922.

“Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho.” Spiritual.

“Stupid Girl.” By Michael Phillip Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work
 #1423058.

“Fuck You.” [“FU.”] By Christopher Brown, Thomas Callaway, Peter
 Hernandez, Philip Lawrence, and Ari Levine. ASCAP Work
 ID: 881948333.

“Doublemint Gum [jingle].” By Steve Karmen. ASCAP Work
 ID: 570017442.

“Hit Me with Your Best Shot.” By Edward Sydney Schwartz. ASCAP
 Work ID: 380218380.

“Burning Love.” By Dennis Linde. BMI Work #160887.

“Hot Blooded.” By Louis A. (Andrew) Grammatico and Michael Leslie
 Jones. ASCAP Work ID: 380199428.

“Some Like It Hot.” By Robert Palmer, Andrew Taylor, and John Taylor.
 ASCAP Work ID: 490555076.

“Baby Face.” By Harry Akst and Benny Davis. ASCAP Work
 ID: 320002564.

“Change Is Gonna Come.” By Sam Cooke. BMI Work #197510.

“So Long, It’s Been Good to Know You [Dusty Old Dust].” By Woody
 Guthrie. BMI Work #1364950.

“My Country ’Tis of Thee.” By Samuel Francis Smith (1831).

“Heartache Tonight.” By Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Bob Seger, and J. D.
 Souther. BMI Work #1754170.

“Both Sides Now.” By Joni Mitchell. ASCAP Work ID: 360095229.

“I’m the Only One.” By Melissa Etheridge. ASCAP Work ID: 390523503.
 “Changes.” By David Bowie. BMI Work #198130.
 “Material Girl.” By Billy Boyo, Madonna, and Byron Whiteley. ASCAP
 Work ID: 881172048.
 “Can’t Buy Me Love.” By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work
 ID: 330138248.
 “[The Night Time Is the] Right Time.” By Ozzie Cadena, Lew Herman,
 and Nappy Brown. BMI Work #6242249.
 “Once in a Lifetime.” By David Byrne, Brian Peter George Eno, Christo-
 pher Frantz, Jerry, Harrison, and Martina Weymouth. BMI Work
 #1117241.
 “Light My Fire.” By John Paul Densmore, Robert A. Krieger, Raymond D.
 Manzarek, and Jim Morrison. ASCAP Work ID: 420138596.
 “Bells Are Ringing.” By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne.
 ASCAP Work ID: 320035636.
 “Till There Was You.” By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work
 ID: 500080424.
 “If I Were a Bell.” By Frank Loesser. ASCAP Work ID: 390095842.
 “Jingle Bells.” By James Lord Pierpont (1822–93).
 “Silver Bells.” By Raymond Evans and Jay Livingston. ASCAP Work
 ID: 490062170.
 “If I Could Turn Back Time.” By Diane Warren. ASCAP Work
 ID: 390467011.
 “I Never Had It So Good.” By Roger Nichols and Paul Williams. ASCAP
 Work ID: 390251637.

[Possible opening music]⁹

[Scene 1]

[At the home of Calvin and Jenny, where Calvin is coughing up a storm]
 Calvin begins

CALVIN

Yo! Jenny!

JENNY

Yes? What is it now?

CALVIN

Help me, dear, please. Come quickly! Ow! Yo! Jenny!

JENNY

Yes? What is it now?

CALVIN

Another cough. My head hurts. Ow. A real bad one this time, and how. Yo! Jenny!

JENNY

Yes? What is it now?

CALVIN

Help me, dear, please. Come quickly! Ow! [*He scans the spectators in attendance.*] Gotta look proper for this crowd.

Come on already! Step on it! Gimme my dressing gown.¹⁰

JENNY

Just look at me. Am I lucky gal or what? Hooked up to that old fart. Same old story and, by that, I mean: gettin' old!¹¹ He's so old, it makes you wanna curse the day, the hour . . . hell, the damn minute you were born! I wish I'd never laid eyes on him!

CALVIN

What's that you're saying there, dear? I can hardly hear you. [*Exasperated, he might gesture to the audience that they quiet down.*]¹² Speak up a bit—won't you, darling?—so that I might tender a proper reply to your remarks.

JENNY

Just leave me alone, God damn it! Not like anything good'll come of it. What do you want me to do with you?

Whatever genius put us two together oughta be thrown to the wolves.¹³

CALVIN

You seem upset. And for no good reason. Unjustly and without cause. Don't we have land and flowering fields and vineyards? Just look around you! There's nobody for miles who even comes close to being better off than we are. [Isn't this my beautiful house? Are you not my beautiful wife?®] Well? How did I get here?® We ought to be giving thanks to almighty God!

JENNY

That's not the issue.¹⁴

CALVIN

Don't you have all the clothes you need? And all those beautiful dresses? And all that beautiful fabric?

JENNY

That's not the issue.

CALVIN

Don't I do right by you every single day, my beauty? And give us each day our daily bread? Praise the Lord! We'll never want for anything.

JENNY

That's not the issue.

CALVIN

I don't give you a hard time, I don't pick a fight, I never lay a hand you. And that's because, the way I see it, there's never been a man loves his wife like I do.

JENNY

That's not the issue.

CALVIN

Don't you get to go out dancing in town with the all other nice ladies?¹⁵ Wherever you please? Have I ever complained about girls' night out?

JENNY

That's not the issue. You're not even getting warm.

CALVIN

So what *is* the issue? Darling, please, I'm asking. Just come right out and tell me. I know I've put on a few pounds and maybe I'm a little bit clumsy and awkward—gone a bit limp—in the romance department. Could that be what's bothering you? That you're not being attended to?

JENNY

Hmmm . . . that rings a bell. You're gettin' warmer.

CALVIN

How's that now?

JENNY

It's only natural. We're talkin' biology.

CALVIN

But, darling, a man can only do what a man can do. You just need to be patient. It's not a hard science, you know. [*{Aside to the audience}* There's wit and there's science.] Sure, practice makes perfect; but not everything gets better with age. As a man gets older, he's got less and less to offer down there. Things go soft. There's labor of love and there's *labor* of love. Even the hardest worker grows weary of his tools.

JENNY

Yeah, well I'm gonna figure somethin' out if it's the last thing I do. I'm on the case and I'll never quit till I find the cure. [*She heads for the door.*]

CALVIN

Where are you going?

JENNY

Just down the road a piece. I'll be back in a bit.

[Jenny exits, leaving an inept Calvin to fend for himself. She might stop somewhere in town. At some point, she will hear the Bell-Maker's sales pitch of Scene 3.]

[Scene 2]

[At the home of Ebenezer and Penny]

[Part of the comedy of this scene is that Ebenezer actually has a chambermaid who is there to help him. Given his "leaky" state, he might even be on the toilet, his needs so intimate that he desires assistance from Penny alone.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the maid is hiding, seeking to be spared any particularly messy task.]

EBENEZER

Good God! What's keeping that woman this time? Always out gal-livantin' somewhere, runnin' her mouth. A man could go nuts! Never around when I need her! Yo! Penny!

PENNY

[She hastens slowly to the door.] Whoever could that be? You rang?

EBENEZER

It's me! Where on earth have you been?

PENNY

I was out in the garden, gettin' cabbage for dinner.

EBENEZER

One really wonders, madam, how it is that you're never around until you want to be.¹⁷

PENNY

So what's the big deal? It's not like I was doin' anything wrong.

EBENEZER

Oh, for Heaven's sake, I wasn't implying anything of the kind. But you know very well that I can't get along without you. I need your help and

your help alone. It's only right that *you* would attend to me and not some stranger.

PENNY

It'll be a cold day in hell before I ever attend to *that*!
Old fart's always complainin' about something! All the time!
There's the coughin' and the spittin' and the sniffin' and the snorin'
and the huffin' and the puffin'. . .
Take my husband! Please!

EBENEZER

My goodness, dear, you seem upset. It was an accident.
Now, didn't God Himself join us together in holy matrimony? So what
if I'm a little over the hill and you're still a sweet bird of youth? Is that
any reason to be unkind or to hold my little imperfections against me?
After all, when you came into this marriage, I barely got \$400 for your
dowry, and that was the whole kit and caboodle. And I could have
found plenty of women with more than \$20,000 to bring to the table.¹⁸
So don't lose sight of the big picture. Courage, dear. It's a virtue, you
know. The grass isn't always greener. Only the best steel goes through
the fire.

PENNY

Monsieur, I'd be very happy to ignore your "accidents," I assure you, but
there's something else, and it's killing me. I'm beside myself.

EBENEZER

But, darling, what is it? Good heavens, my love, tell me. Are you sick?
Are you in pain? Just say the word and I'll send for the best doctor in
town.

PENNY

No, not exactly.

EBENEZER

Is it a neighbor? Did somebody do something? Say something to
offend you?
I'll take care of it right away, and there'll be hell to pay!

PENNY

No, not exactly.

EBENEZER

Do you want for anything? Something to eat or drink? I know very well that nobody ever says “no” to you in this house, whatever it is.

PENNY

No, not exactly.

EBENEZER

Is it a pretty new dress that you need? More fabric for whatever they’re wearing these days?

PENNY

No, not exactly.

EBENEZER

Have I ever threatened you? Hit you? Slapped you? Beat you? Ever said anything worse than “Penny, Penny, Penny!” whatever you’ve done?

PENNY

No, not exactly.

EBENEZER

Then, for pity’s sake, get it off your chest! What’s the trouble? Just tell me and I’ll take care of it.

PENNY

I most certainly will not.

EBENEZER

What is this? Twenty Questions? What do you mean “you will not”? Fine. Does it have anything to do with . . . planting seeds? You’re waiting for the happy farmer? Is it the game of love that’s got you down in the dumps?

PENNY

You said it, not me. I'm not making any accusations.

EBENEZER

At least give a guy a little credit for trying. A man can only do his best. Sometimes he just needs to rest, especially if he's got no choice. Just be patient. Take it as it comes.

PENNY

That's the whole point. It *doesn't* come and I don't like it.

EBENEZER

[*Whispering*] You can still have fun doing other things on your own, you know. Don't sweat the small stuff.

PENNY

Small stuff is right! Go on, speak softly. I still want the big stick.

EBENEZER

Don't think about it any more.

PENNY

I can't help it. I have needs.

EBENEZER

A good woman lives a chaste life. Virtue is a beautiful thing.

PENNY

Virtue, shmirtue! It's overrated and I'm a woman in need. So if you won't thread my needle, I'll go spin somewhere else. I'm leavin'. Gonna go hang with my girlfriend.

EBENEZER

Go on, then. And if my friend Calvin would like to join us for supper, do bring him back with you. We'll all have a nice meal together. It'll be fun.

[*Exit Penny for Jenny's*]

[Scene 3]

[Enter Smitty Black, perhaps after having eavesdropped on one or both couples. He sets up shop in the square with all his portable equipment.]

THE BELL-MAKER, SMITTY BLACK

Step right up, folks! Step right up! Old pots and pans! Old pots and pans right here! Got stuff? Got *old* stuff? I got the goods! Bring it right on over here! Come on down!

[He watches as passersby ignore him or as no one in the audience applauds his entrance.]

Will you look at that? If a man can't figure out how to make a living these days, rake it in, scrimp and save, they treat you like a dog. But I know my trade, all right, I got the skills, [and I'm feelin' the burn]. It's a good, honest living. *[He glares at the unresponsive audience.]* In most places.

Hey, listen up folks! Friends, lovers, countrymen! Children of all ages! Lend me your ears 'cause I'll have you know I been to school. I paid my dues. I know all the tricks o' the trade, as we soon shall see . . . and right before your very eyes!

[He might break into song to attract attention. Leaving his tools and merchandise unattended, he might then wander into the audience.] From the mountains to the prairies to the oceans . . .[©] From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters. . . .[©]

That's right, folks! Gimme a metal—any metal—and I'll make a bell out of it. [And gimme a break: it's a real profession! Think of it as Renaissance *Bell-Fashioning*!] I got bells o' silver, bells o' gold, bells o' steel! Brass bells! In fact, if I had a bell, I'd ring it in the morning, I'd ring it in the evening, all over this land.[©] . . .

[He returns to his spot.] Whatcha got, folks? Iron? Brass? Copper? Bronze? I can cast it and recast it into anything you want: kettles, pots, pans for any house, hearth, or home. [Hell, I can recast this whole damn play!]

But most of all, folks, I got a special skill. Do what nobody else can do. That's right, folks, they call me the Great Rejuvenator! I work on men, and it comes in real handy these days. I know how to cast *men*. I'm a rehabber, folks, a hands-on husband remodeler. [Melt down your raw materials, recast, refashion, burnish, polish, and buff 'em up, all shiny

and new.] Gimme a forty-year-old geezer,¹⁹ and I'll have him up and runnin' in no time. Good as a twenty year old! Workin' those rusty parts again, if you catch my drift.
[Smitty Black's my name, and rejuvenatin's my game.] Need my services? Step right up, 'cause here I am! [Just call me Black of all trades.] Come on now, ladies, ring my bells! The heat is on.[©] Seek and ye shall find! [*There are no takers.*]
[I guess I'll just have to wait till my next scene.]

[Lights up in both households for two mimed scenes. Both Jenny and Penny make a last-ditch attempt at seduction. Both attempts fail, prompting Penny to rush over to Jenny's. Lights out at Penny and Ebenezer's house.]

[Scene 4]

PENNY

Yo, girlfriend! You home?

JENNY

Who's there?

PENNY

It is I, who is . . . am . . . It's me, girl. In the flesh.

JENNY

Boy, am I glad to see you! What the hell are you doing here in such a state? [And at this time o' night?] Quick! Come in! What happened?

PENNY

I've got something to tell you and . . . I really want to tell you the whole story but . . . can you keep a secret? Can I trust you?

JENNY

Cross my heart and hope to die! What is it? Come on, girl, spill.

PENNY

It's the pain! It's awful! I'm gonna have a heart attack!

JENNY

How can I help? Just tell me. No secrets between friends. 'Specially not between girlfriends.

PENNY

I'm too embarrassed to say.

JENNY

What is it?

PENNY

It's my husband. He's too old. He's got nothin'.

JENNY

You mean . . . down there?

PENNY

Dead as a doornail. He's not interested.

JENNY

Well, aren't we just two peas in a pod? Join the club, sister! I've never been so miserable in my life!

PENNY

You mean he doesn't even try?

JENNY

Barely.

PENNY

What the fuck is wrong with them? It's like the minute they hit the sack, they're down for the count. Mine's already been out for hours.

JENNY

You know it! Down till dawn, just like the hogs.

PENNY

They got some nerve. They got a job to do!

JENNY

Yeah, well, there's no lyin' down on the job at my place. I know exactly what you mean. But what are we gonna do about it?

PENNY

[*Seductively?*] You mean about the matter in hand? I don't know what to tell you.

JENNY

[*Flustered by the advance?*] I hear there's a new guy in town. They say he's a master craftsman, a real magician. His name's already on everybody's lips. Blowin' everybody away.

PENNY

What does he do?

JENNY

What else? Extreme husband makeover! Out with the old, in with the new.

PENNY

God damn! Ante up! I'm in for a hundred bucks.

JENNY

You're on! We've gotta go for it because one thing's for damn sure: they'll never be any use to us in the shape they're in. [*She fumbles around looking for money.*] I've got two C-notes says I'm in.²⁰

PENNY

We'll have to talk it over with them first. See what they have to say.

JENNY

They'll go for it. A little flattery goes a long, long way.

PENNY

So get a move on! I'm outta here. Let the conversion begin!

[Penny is in no hurry to leave, in need of a good-bye kiss. Once she departs, she is in no hurry to get home. For her own part, Jenny could be up all night, perhaps pondering the extent to which she is bi-curious.]

[Scene 5]

[Lights up at the home of Ebenezer and Penny, perhaps the next day, the hour to be determined.]

[Ebenezer wakes up, either first thing in the morning or from a nap. At some point he sees that his wife is missing. He might be struggling with a chamber pot. Enter Penny.]

EBENEZER

And where on earth have you been?

PENNY

Who? Me? Out investigating a new technique. My dear Ebenezer, we've got the chance of a lifetime! For real. It's an amazing opportunity. All totally scientific. Just wait till you hear.

EBENEZER

What is it?

PENNY

It's eternal youth! We're gonna get you rejuvenated! A makeover! You'll be twenty years old again!

EBENEZER

It sounds to me like a complete waste of time. And money.

PENNY

No way! I swear to God, the guy's an expert! He's got an office right here in town. You can't imagine how many makeovers he's done: ten thousand and counting!²¹ And every single one of 'em comes back

good as new, all ready to strike while the iron is hot! It's a recast of thousands!

EBENEZER

I can hardly wait. What'll it set me back this time? A couple o' grand? Come on, let's get it over with.²²

PENNY

God only knows you need it. Jeez. You're forty years older than me.

[He and Penny leave for their friends' place.]

[Scene 6]

[Lights up on the home of Calvin and Jenny. Jenny climbs into bed and wakes Calvin up.]

JENNY

So, Calvin, you'll never guess what.

CALVIN

No, what?

JENNY

You are old, Father Calvin, the young wife said, and your hair has become very white. And yet. . .

Let's face it: you're done and it's high time to do something about it.

We've gotta fix you up, rejuvenate you.

I know! How's about a makeover? What do you say? Pretty please?

CALVIN

But how would that work exactly?

JENNY

Like a charm. Because I know just the place and just the man for the job.

CALVIN

Anyone makin' *this* raw material over better have first-rate stuff. Fragile. Handle with care.²³

JENNY

Not to worry. This guy's the best in the business. You'll have all the bells and whistles.

CALVIN

Okay, fine. Let's go.

JENNY

Oh, by the way, your friend Ebenezer will be joining you.

CALVIN

I should think *he'd* be there with bells on. He's at least twenty years older than me!

JENNY

Got a lotta miles on him, for sure. He really needs it.

[*Ebenezer and Penny arrive.*]

[Scene 7]

CALVIN

So, pal, I guess we're off to see the wizard,[©] eh? What do you think of this whole business?

[EBENEZER]

What do I know? I guess it's possible. Seems like, if it really works, it could do us both a world o' good. Best thing that ever happened to us!

[CALVIN]

From sixty years old to twenty? You can't beat that!²⁴ Let's just forge ahead.

EBENEZER

Now that's what I call a ringing endorsement. Fine. Let's see what he can do.

PENNY

Why, only just yesterday he did a makeover on a bricklayer. Knocked forty years right off the top, or somethin' like that. Turned 'im into such a stud muffin that . . . talk about your buns in the oven! [*Making the sign of the cross*] People thought it was a fuckin' miracle!

[*Everybody leaves together to find the Bell-Maker.*]

[Scene 8]

[*At the marketplace "office" of the Bell-Maker*]

[*Calvin and Ebenezer scrutinize Smitty's equipment with suspicion.*]

CALVIN

Good day to you, sir. [You must be Mr. Pennington.]

THE BELL-MAKER

Hey, hey, hey! Whaddaya say? Welcome, welcome, *Monsieur*. [And, by the way, you're thinking of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.]

EBENEZER

[Then you must be Mr. Powell.] Are you sure you have enough coal there? And what about bellows? We'd like to be twenty years old again, if at all possible.

THE BELL-MAKER

That's a tall order. The heat is on.^{©25} [And, *no*: you're thinking of *Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition*. Although, come to think of it, you gents could stand to lose a few. . . .]

JENNY

We'll make it worth your while, Doc, promise. Hell's bells! We're at our wits' end!

THE BELL-MAKER

[The name's Black. Smitty Black.] And there's not a geezer out there—cross-eyed codgers or one-eyed Jacks—that I can't rejuvenate! Piece o' cake! Pop 'em right into my magic oven and—oh yeah!—burn, baby, burn![©] But be careful what you wish for: it might come true.

CALVIN

Oh please, spare me. Let's have it: What's it gonna set us back? Then we'll see if you're the man for the job.

THE BELL-MAKER

That'll be ten grand apiece. Money, money, money, money, get a little, get a little.[©] . . .

EBENEZER

You oughta be ashamed of yourself, asking for that kind of money *apiece*. That's highway robbery.

THE BELL-MAKER

\$5K each. Two for the price o' one. That's my final offer or it's hands off. I don't touch 'em.²⁶

PENNY

What are you waiting for? *Carpe diem*, for God's sake!²⁷ Who cares what it costs?

CALVIN

Fine. It's a deal.

THE BELL-MAKER

All in good time. But, first, I'll need to have the reasons. And your wives will have to sign this release form. If they're sorry later, I can't have 'em coming back with a case of buyer's remorse.

You know, ladies, in my opinion, you're better off keeping your husbands just the age they are.[©] . . .

PENNY

As if! That's none of your business![©]

THE BELL-MAKER

What does it cost you to keep 'em around? So what? So what if they're old and their hair has become very white? Do you think, at their age, this is right? And what are you, crazy? Got bats in your belfry? You lead 'em around by the nose. They do everything you say. You make all the rules. You're mistresses of the house!® Plus you got all their money to spread around.

JENNY

Oh for God's sake, just make 'em over already. Go on. Melt 'em down, dooby-doo, down down!®²⁸

THE BELL-MAKER

The customer is always right.
Sure. I'll make 'em over for you. But, they look just fine to me as is.
Hey, big spenders,® where you boys from anyway?

CALVIN

We're from just down the road a piece. Both of us. From right here, born and bred. I was born in a small town.®

THE BELL-MAKER

Why in the world do you wanna go changin' 'em up for? When nature made these guys, she threw away the mold. [*He conducts a brief inspection.*]
[Why, I do believe your Mr. Pennington himself couldn't find nothin' to make over here. So beware! Better watch out those walls don't come a-tumblin' down!®] You'd be hard pressed to find two better specimens from here to Sunday.²⁹ Real hard-pressed.

JENNY

Not so hard at all. Mary, Mother of God!

THE BELL-MAKER

Bimbos! Stupid girls!®
I don't know what you're tryin' to pull but, mark my words: before the month is out, you'll be sorry.

JENNY

Up yours! Fuck you!®

THE BELL-MAKER

Whatever you say, ma'am.

EBENEZER

Can we speed it up here, Doc? Chop-chop! Let's get this show on the road.

PENNY

Step on it, Doc! Melt 'em down! Make 'em over! Let the chips fall where they may. [*She might brandish a jar of Pringles: baked, not fried.*]

JENNY

What could possibly go wrong?

THE BELL-MAKER

Fine. But it's against my better judgment. I wash my hands of it.³⁰
[*He motions the two husbands into the oven.*] Go on, get in! Quick—
God help me!—before I change my mind!
[*To the women*] But, whatever happens, it's on you!
Somethin' about this just don't feel right.

CALVIN

[*He inspects some of the materials with suspicion.*] You must have some kind of protective coating, no? [This stuff is Teflon, right?] And make sure you use a timer, there, Doc. We don't want to burn to a crisp in there! [*Jokingly, à la Wicked Witch of the West*] I'm melting . . . I'm melting . . . Curses, broiled again!³¹

PENNY

Jesus H. Christ! If you can't stand the heat, get outta the kitchen!
Senile, old farts!

THE BELL-MAKER

Okey-dokey, then. Want 'em back young, ready, willing, and able? Then say your prayers, girls, because here goes nothin'! Make a wish, then blow!

But beware: a change in age means a change in ways.

JENNY

That's the whole point. We *want* 'em to change their ways!

[*With varying degrees of timorousness and courage, the men step into the oven.*]

THE BELL-MAKER

If only there were enough raw material on the face of the earth for a *real* change [and not just some stupid lifestyle lift]. But you can't really have two men in one. It's Doctor Jekyll *or* Mr. Hyde. I can only wonder what you'll make of the finished product when it comes out.

[O, alchemy! O alchemy!

These two men with a heart of gold

May melt away. They're not so old.

And yet, when this shall come to pass,

What shall you say?³²]

PENNY

I'll say: "At last!" As long as all the parts are in workin' order, we'll take two, two, two men in one! Double the pleasure, double the fun,[©] that's what I say. One for work, one for play! One for weekdays, one for weekends and holidays.

THE BELL-MAKER

You want a red-hot man, is it? Fine. Since there's no reasoning with you, here: take the bellows yourselves! Go on, fire away![®] You can huff, you can puff till you blow your house down!

JENNY

You got it!

[Both women fall furiously upon the bellows during the procedure.]

THE BELL-MAKER

If that don't take the cake! Most impulsive women I ever seen in all my born days!³³ They're reckless.

PENNY

So? [What's up, Doc?] How are our husbands doing? You could at least give us a progress report. [What the hell kinda weenie roast is this anyway?] We want hot dogs, not a goddamn pig in a poke!

THE BELL-MAKER

Oh, they're cookin' now, all right. Hard to say how they'll turn out.

[Impatient and with much use of the bellows, the women also begin sticking their hands in the "oven" at the risk of getting burned. Giggling too at all the double entendres they're about to make, they might employ cake-baking techniques to test readiness: a piece of straw from a whisk broom, toothpicks, thermometers, etc.]

JENNY

They're really cookin' up a storm in there. Wow. But I better blow a lot harder right about . . . here. You want 'em cooked evenly, you know.

PENNY

Mine was still ice-cold. Not a hot spot anywhere.

JENNY

So, Doc, are they melting or what?

THE BELL-MAKER

What do you think? We're moments away from the finished product. [And the denouement too, folks!] Come on, now, girls: Blow! I said blow!

Yup. They're really startin' to take. Get ready, get set. . . .

[Ex parte] Just like makin' a bell: Ding-dong-ding, you ding-a-lings!

PENNY

I think you might be right about that. I just had a look at mine there,
Iron Chef, and . . . wow.

JENNY

As long as mine comes out red hot, who cares about the price to pay?³⁴
Long as he's a hunk o', hunk o' burnin' love!®

THE BELL-MAKER

Talk about blowin' it! Just you watch, folks: she's all fired up now, but
wait till Easter because the dead shall rise!³⁵ Hell's bells! She's gonna
look like death warmed over! So miserable she'll wanna walk across the
fire® just to have that first husband o' hers back again.
But, hey! Not another word outta me [unless it's to say . . .

Hear the loud alarum bells—Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells! . . .
They can only shriek, shriek,
Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
Leaping higher, higher, higher,
With a desperate desire. . . .
Oh, the bells, bells, bells! . . .
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
In the clamor and the clanging of the bells!]³⁶

PENNY

So? Are they done or what? [Mine still looks kinda rare.]

THE BELL-MAKER

Almost. Almost. Patience, madam, it's a virtue. After all, Rome wasn't
burnt in a day.

[*To the audience*] [Okay, so maybe it was.]

This is science, ladies, you don't get results overnight! [Not *publishable* results anyway. And, hey, folks: speakin' o' published results, our play goes on sale tomorrow at a bookstore near you!]³⁷

JENNY

They been in that oven o' yours for over an hour already!

THE BELL-MAKER

Didn't you ever hear that haste makes waste? This material's gotta be cast just right. It's a process of refining. You wouldn't much like it now—would you?—if yours were to come out upside down or inside out or with a gimpy leg? You don't want a cross-eyed codger or a one-eyed Jack, right? [Or the Hunchback o' Notre Dame? Or Frankenstein?]³⁸ No creation of mine before its time.

PENNY

Duh. But mine still looks underdone. He's all pale.³⁹

THE BELL-MAKER

Easy does it. I know what I'm doing.

JENNY

Oh, and, by the way: We'll be paying you in gold today. [*She reaches into her bosom.*] I do believe I've got a little something for you right here. As you know, we're in charge of the finances.⁴⁰

PENNY

Are they done, Doc?

THE BELL-MAKER

See for yourselves. They're almost all set.

Come on, girls, one more breath. Go on, blow! Get a little color in their cheeks. Get 'em just the way you like 'em. [The chef recommends medium rare.]

[*The women blow, with Jenny expending considerable effort, which she will do throughout the ensuing dialogue.*]

JENNY

That's the best I can do. I'm all blown out. Damn! Isn't mine done already? Remember: not too hot, not too cold. Just right.

PENNY

Personally, I like 'em hot. I like my meat bloody and my men hot-blooded,[©] you hear me? I got no use for a wuss. It's depressing.⁴¹

JENNY

Some like it hot.[©] Come to think of it, I do like a little heat myself, blood rushin' straight to the head. A brave, sturdy, stand-up kinda guy.

THE BELL-MAKER

I know, I know. Don't want the cutest little baby face.[©] We're refining here. Too much polish and you polish 'em off.

[Perhaps I could give these Americans an analogy. You know how, when you refinish a floor, you can only do it so many times before there's nothing left to refinish? Same thing here.

Or take cooking. You can't overdo it. Some tastes are delicate, subtle. There's refining and there's refined. It's all a matter of. . .] What can I say? You don't want this whole business to leave a bad taste in your mouth.

JENNY

Taste, shmaste! As long as there's somethin' in my mouth! I *want* 'im fuckin' polished! What the hell good is a man who ain't refined? He might as well be a baboon. Damn fool was just a big pussy. Made me the woman *and* the man o' the house.

PENNY

Mine never made a move without me. Like I was the goddamn director.

[*The bell on the timer goes off, and Smitty might ring a few bells too.*]

THE BELL-MAKER

And, soon enough, it'll be just the opposite. If I'm not mistaken, things will be taking a very different direction before you can say "boo."

JENNY

They are lookin' pretty sturdy in there, built to last. You sure they're not too tough?

THE BELL-MAKER

They were pretty set in their ways. That happens with age. It gave me quite a bit of trouble.⁴²

JENNY

There's not a breath left in my body, I swear! I'm all blown out.

[*The two husbands emerge from the oven.*]

THE BELL-MAKER

Abracadabra and alakazam! Presto change-o! They're all done! Everything seems to be in the right place. Two eyes. One nose. No pug nose.⁴³

Praise the Lord and sing it with me, girls: Glory, hallelujah! Here are your husbands, all warm from the oven and lookin' fine!

JENNY

Boy oh boy, they look good enough to eat. I do believe they'll do very nicely.

THE BELL-MAKER

All in a day's work.

So I guess it's fair to say I earned my fee here today. [*No money is forthcoming.*] You goin' Dutch here, or what?

But, please, by all means: make sure you can pick your husbands out.

JENNY

I think this one's mine. What's your name, big boy? Calvin, right?

CALVIN

Big boy is right, bitch! Big and strong instead o' soft and gentle! You are so my bitch! [*Raising his hand*] It's my turn now. Get ready 'cause a change is gonna come.® I'll be taking charge around here.

PENNY

[*Approaching her own husband*] Good afternoon, *Monsieur*. And who might you be? Don't tell me it's my dear Ebenezer.

EBENEZER

You got that right, bitch. Brawny and horny instead o' soft and gentle.⁴⁴ Not the way I used to be. [And you better not be breakin' my bells!] [*Raising his hand*] Now wipe that goddamn smirk off your face before I do it for you!

PENNY

What in the . . . ? Jen? What's the meaning of this? My husband's completely different.

JENNY

And mine's totally altered. He already threatened to beat me! I think somethin' mighta got lost in translation here.

CALVIN

Here you go, my good man. Right down to the penny. Got your \$5K we owe you right here. For the both of us. Paid in full. See you around, Doc.⁴⁵ Nice work. Good job. So long, it's been good to know ya![©] [Let freedom ring![©]]

EBENEZER

God bless you, man.

THE BELL-MAKER

[*He fails to notice that he has been stiffed.*] Go with God, gentlemen! I mean, *boys!*

JENNY

Holy filet of fuck! Our husbands turned out obnoxious. They're down-right testy. This is anarchy.

PENNY

Mine's got one nose all right, and it's outta joint. I don't know what the hell to say to 'im.

[The two couples part company and head for their respective homes. Calvin and Jenny clearly make it at least to their front door. Lights down on Ebenezer and Penny. Alternatively—and mixed metaphor notwithstanding—the latter couple might freeze.]

[Scene 9]

CALVIN

So: you wanted to make me over, did you, madam? You wanted things to change? You got it. I'll be the lord and master around here. Now fork over the keys! I'll take every one in the house.

JENNY

I will not.

CALVIN

You will not? *[He hits her over the head with a pot.]*⁴⁶ The hell you say, bitch! You will!

[He beats her.]

JENNY

Lord have mercy! That's enough! Please.⁴⁷

CALVIN

Now you know what it's like! And if you ripped me off one red cent over all these years, then you're gonna pay the hell up, bitch. *[Not one dime, you hear me?]*

"Somebody's gonna hurt someone. . . ."©

[JENNY

Could it be Satan? That's the only one coulda cooked up this nasty makeover business.]⁴⁸

[Scene 10]

[Lights up on Ebenezer and Penny. This scene plays out either in public as the couple heads home or in private once they are inside.]

EBENEZER

Get over here, Missy, and open the damn the books. *[Menacing her]* I'll have the full accounting this minute: down to every last . . . *penny*.

PENNY

What is this? We just had you made over! I object! I won't put up with it.

I don't get it.

EBENEZER

Oh, you'll get it, all right. Now shut your damn trap. We'll see what your objections are worth!

[Ebenezer searches for the largest possible stick.]

PENNY

What's the meaning of this?

EBENEZER

Weren't you just asking for a big stick? Well, get a load o' this, bitch, 'cause I'm gonna whup your ass!

PENNY

Is that so?

EBENEZER

You're goddamn right, and then some!

[Penny tries to run away; Ebenezer blocks her.]

*[A choreographed doubled version begins here.]*⁴⁹

[Scene 11]

CALVIN

A makeover? You really dare?
You thought that you could change me, *dear*?
I'm master now, so I shall seize
All that's my due. Gimme the keys!
That's every single one, you hear?

JENNY

No way!

CALVIN

Bitch, get your ass in gear!
You'll do exactly as I say!
[*He beats her.*]

JENNY

For pity's sake!

CALVIN

You're gonna pay
For bitchin' every single day.
If you stashed one red cent away
Or if I sense there's been foul play,
You, bitch, will pay!

[Scene 12]

EBENEZER

Get over here! It's time to pay.
Open the books, bitch, make my day!
Count every cent! Madame, obey!
Down to the *penny*.

PENNY

What'd you say?
You had a makeover today.
And as for me, well, I'm opposed!

EBENEZER

You shut your trap. I so direct.
Your opposition's shit, I say.

[Ebenezer looks for another stick.]

PENNY

What do you mean?

EBENEZER

I mean make way: *[Pointing to the sticks and rods]*
I'll beat your ass with one of those.

PENNY

Oh yeah?

EBENEZER

Damn right! We'll see who blows!
[Penny tries again to run out of the house to Jenny's; Ebenezer blocks her way.] And you're not goin' anywhere.

[Doubled version ends here.]

[A struggle ensues but Penny eventually breaks free and escapes.]

[Scene 13]

[At the home of Calvin and Jenny]

[Penny quickly composes herself and then makes a run for it over to Jenny's.]

PENNY

Yo, girlfriend! You home?

JENNY

Who's there?

PENNY

It is I, who is . . . am . . . It's me, girl. But just barely! I'm a mess.

JENNY

What's wrong?

PENNY

God damn it! What the hell ever possessed us to do such a stupid thing?

JENNY

[I'm kinda thinkin' we blew it.] We got really bad advice is all. And now we're the ones payin' for it.

[*She sings something.*]⁵⁰

PENNY

Yeah, well, I wasn't born yesterday. If we don't take matters in hand right quick, we're better off dead!

JENNY

We gotta get back to the doctor. Whatever it takes so he can age 'em back to how they were before. There must be something he can do. I'm sure we can talk him into it.

PENNY

[*She might reach into the one place Ebenezer hasn't inspected yet.*] I still have two hundred bucks or so in the cookie jar.⁵¹ He's welcome to it if he can help us out.

JENNY

[*She begins triage of the bolts of gorgeous fabric and her dresses.*] I don't care if I have to hock my whole closet—all my best stuff!—he's gotta

help us out. We'll just make him understand that he's our only hope. Surely he's still got somethin' up his sleeve.

PENNY

He's got to say yes. We'll make it worth his while [Think he'd take it out in trade?]

[*They rush back to the Bell-Maker.*]

[Scene 14]

JENNY

We're back, Doc, and we've got good money. Think you could you make a house call?

THE BELL-MAKER

[Like a bad Penny!] Welcome back, ladies. What brings you back this way? How's everything working out?

PENNY

Not very well, actually. Doc, we're miserable. We're really sorry we made our husbands over. Mine already tried to kill me.

JENNY

And mine tried to crack my head open with a pot! Talk about your brass. . . .

THE BELL-MAKER

You ain't seen nothin' yet! Lordy, Lordy! This little party's just gettin' started!

[*To the audience*] Nothin's ever good enough! When a woman's got it good, she's bad. When she's bad . . . bitch gonna get it good!

PENNY

No need to rub it in! Okay, fine: we women can be a bit foolish, I'll grant you. We don't always behave as well as we ought to. [*She sighs.*]

THE BELL-MAKER

Ought to? I'll tell you about "ought to"! You shoulda never *ought to* have come round here to do business with me in the first place. You had two perfectly good husbands.

PENNY

Can you cut us a break, Doc? Please. Or we're goners for sure. Look! I'm on my knees here.

THE BELL-MAKER

Just what is it you think you can do for me? I mean: that I can do for you? Just say the word: I'm all yours.

JENNY

[*In her best seductive posture*] We're prepared to marshal all our resources. Surely you must have somethin' left in your bag of tricks. You can make them old again, right? We never knew we had it so good.®

THE BELL-MAKER

Is that so?

JENNY

Sure thing. We had it all, and we let it slip right through our fingers.

THE BELL-MAKER

I'm not gonna lie to you: don't be surprised now if things go from bad to worse. The thing is, even if you were to give me the whole ten grand apiece, I could never work on 'em now. For one thing, I know exactly what they'd have to say about it: they'd never agree. They'd be out of their minds to.

So chin up, girls! Just hang in there as best you can. You didn't want to believe me when you still had the chance and I gave you fair warning. It's time to face the music. You're gonna be miserable. Just grin and bear it.

So think no more of how things used to be.
There's only what the future holds, you see.

JENNY

Woe is me! Alas and alack! Whatever is to become of us? We've never been in pain like this before! [{*To the audience*} What? I'm *acting*!]

PENNY

What she said! We'd be better off dead! Don't let us languish in despair! [{*To the audience*} What? Me too.]

JENNY

Alas and alack! I dare say we'll never be in charge again! Lord have mercy, we might as well face the music. No more pleasure, no more fun. Just pain and suffering. They doubled down.

THE BELL-MAKER

Jeez, girls, no need to be a drag about it. Men are powerful: it's only natural to obey them. And that, [ladies and gentlemen], is why they should rule wisely: with a firm but gentle hand [because, when all is set and done: Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. . . .]

[*Doubled version begins here*]

THE BELL-MAKER

Time to make nice as best you can.
Be good. Be patient with your man.
I tried to warn the both of you
But did you listen? Nope. It's true.
Sometimes it's best to let things be:
So think no more of how things used to be.
There's only what the future holds, you see.⁵²

JENNY

Alas! What's to become of me?
We've never hurt like this before.

PENNY

We might as well give up the ghost.
It hurts too bad. Face it. We're toast.

JENNY

We got no say. Not even close.
I get it. There's no need to gloat.
We're all done in. That case is closed.
There's only pain and suffering.

THE BELL-MAKER

I think she's got it! Ding-dong-ding!
So knock it off. Men rule the roost.
Obey them, lest they cook your goose.
[Or, simply put: just stop your bitchin'.
You *need* the heat! Stay in the kitchen!]
And yet. . . . Men! Rule with gentle hand!

[*Doubled version ends here.*]

Look at the time! Strike up the band!
Don't bitch no more. Leave things alone
'Cause now, it's time to go on home.
That's quite enough fun for today.
Keep what you got, girls. Party's over!
And don't you make your husbands over!

Here ends the Farce of the Women who want
to make over their husbands.

12.

Marriage with a Grain of Salt

Les Hommes qui font saller leurs femmes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARCEL (Marceau)

JULIAN (Jullien)

GILLY, Marcel's Wife (Gillette, femme de Marceau)

FRANÇOISE, Julian's Wife (Françoise, femme de Jullien)

PROFESSOR PYLON, a Philosopher (Maistre Macé, Philosophe de Bretaig[n]e)

[A number of Extras to round out the marketplace]

PRODUCTION NOTES

What better way to let the curtain fall on this volume than with this buried treasure that has barely been read in the past four hundred years? *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* serves up a delicious reminder that farce was one of the first literary genres to attract the interest of publishers. The anonymous *Discours facétieux des hommes qui font saller leurs femmes, à cause qu'elles sont trop douces, lequel se joue à cinq personnages* comme on peut veoir à la page suivante, presents as a “facetious dialogue” (the literal meaning of *Discours facétieux*) that “can be seen” on the printed page (my emphasis). It is an unpaginated, early printed book, published at least twice by the renowned Abraham Cousturier, who did business in Rouen between 1582 and 1628.¹ Two editions are known, one of which was located and edited by Michel Rousse as part of his unpublished dissertation (*TFFMA*, 2: 549–73): Bibliothèque Nationale, Réserve des livres rares, RES-YE-2029. That is the edition that I follow, supplemented, when necessary, by page numbers from the Rousse edition.²

There is no modern French or English translation and, were it not for several summaries, this salty play would probably never have been rediscovered at all.

Both Petit de Julleville (*RTC*, #118, 149) and Faivre recap the plot (*Répertoire*, 208–9), as did the Frères Parfaict before them in one of the very few analyses in the secondary literature (*HTF*, 3: 305–9). Rousse postulates that the *Discours Facétieux* was written in the last quarter of the sixteenth century—Faivre agrees (*Répertoire*, 209)—upon which the former amplifies its publication history. There were two nineteenth-century editions, one shepherded by the Baronne de Montaran, an important Enlightenment figure in her own right (*TFFMA*, 2: 551–52). She included the play as #4 in her *Recueil de livrets singuliers*, of which only fourteen copies were printed. The second nineteenth-century edition is a reprint of the Montaran edition by J. Pinard entitled *Collection d'opuscules en vers et en prose*, of which forty-two were printed in Paris in 1830. *Les Hommes qui font saller leurs femmes* is 306 octosyllabic verses in the Rousse edition.

Performance History?

Notorious for their inaccuracy, the Frères Parfaict speculate that the *Discours facétieux* was performed by the Enfants-sans-Souci on one of the many stages erected throughout Paris (*HTF*, 3: 305).³ If they are correct, such a mise-en-scène would be a testament to the enduring influence not only of the *causes grasses* (such as that of 1634; above, “Introduction”) but of Basochial farce per se. Quoth Rousse, since *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* was being copied toward the end of the sixteenth century, it demonstrates that the so-called gap between medieval comedy and the genius of Molière is not as wide as once thought (*TFFMA*, 2: 553–54).⁴ He is right.

Plot

Beloved though *The School for Wives* might be, Molière scarcely invented the convention of the jealous husband who lives in fear that his lovely, (much) younger wife will make a cuckold out of him (*TFFMA*, 2: 553–54). In this very volume, we have already seen it launch the plot of #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*. But in *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* there is a twist, and it's something almost unheard of in farce. Although another tale of two couples gives rise to another game of *tenson*-like one-upmanship, this one is about who is *happier*. Soon enough, the debate as to which wife is more docile, accommodating, and loving becomes an exercise in paranoia. Gilly and Françoise are just a tad too sweet.

The trouble begins with Julian. If Gilly is nice to *him*, then—oh my God!—she's bound to be nice to *every* man (and everyman). Clearly, something must be done; but what? The two good buddies resolve that the “gals” should be “saltier,” a term that, happily, packs much of its literal and figurative punch in English (below, § “Language”). Armed with stealthily collected urine specimens, they enlist the pseudomedical services of one of farce's sleazier practitioners. This one, Professor Pylon (pronounced Pile-On), is basically a snake-oil salesman, akin to Doc Double-Talk in *Playing Doctor* (FF, #6), and he appears to have a PhD. (In the words of the father of my college roommate, he's the “kinda doctor who don't do no good for nobody.”) Provided the price is right, this good doctor is all too eager to pile it on higher and deeper: the charm, the salt, and the bullshit. Plus, compared to Smitty Black's pretty penny in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, his salty services are a terrific deal at a mere ten *francs* or about \$200 in U.S. currency (above, “About This Translation,” § “Money, Money, Money”). Needless to say, when Marcel and Julian bring in their lovely wives for salting, things will not go as planned.

Once the professor is alone with the two women, he orders them to strip and hop into his magic tub for their “cure.” No sides of pork, they, Gilly and Françoise categorically refuse, objecting that they can get plenty salty on their own with no help from him, thank you very much. They don't relish having something mansplained to them and reject the *man*-ipulation. But this is farce. Any triumph of female assertiveness normally leads to a Pyrrhic victory, which seems to obtain here inasmuch as even the most delectable gal is but an undercover bitch who can't win for losing. The thing is: as the plot doubles down on the duality of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, the men lose too. Their foolish expenditure is pork barrel. You can't have sweet and salty in one and the same bill . . . or woman. And pity the husband who forces her hand . . . or the doctor who employs a sinisterly synecdochic hands-on treatment. When the two wives rejoin their husbands after having accessed their inner shrews, they are salty indeed. Meanwhile, Marcel and Julian are as surprised as the proverbial bell-maker (above, #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, § “Plot”) by the newly nasty, husband-beating harpies. All's well that does not end well. And, familiar though the moral of the story is by now, it leaves quite the bitter taste in the mouths of its addressees: caveat emptor, boys, and stick with what you've got; don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

But what actually happened? Did the women capitulate and step into the tub for a comic (mis)treatment? And, if so, who administers it? Who treats whom? In farce's ingenious mélange of symbolic literalism and literal

symbolism, do Gilly and Françoise rub salt in their own psychic wounds by salting *themselves*? Do they salt each other? And, if so, where do they do it? Technically, this is a matter of sets and staging; but it must be addressed at this juncture under “Plot” because the bath is the watershed for all the metaphorical streams of this farce.

Baths were medicinal sites for the palliative cures that our salty play literalizes as “curing.”⁵ They were also the baptismal sites that it symbolizes.⁶ Gilly and Françoise are meant to emerge from the salt tub new baptized; but this is not *Romeo and Juliet*. Additionally, if the occasional fifteenth-century Book of Hours depicted the Virgin Mary attended while bathing, if Roland (of *Song of Roland* fame) dreamed of a bath before being transported to the heavens by angels (Figure 10), baths were also associated with licentious sexuality and adultery (Figure 11).⁷ Recall the twelfth-century tale of “Equitan” by Marie de France, in which the lascivious king Equitan and his adulterous mistress are murdered when scalded in a deadly bath that Equitan had had drawn for her husband (*Lais*, 67–69). Recall too that the specter of adultery is the very thing that traumatizes Marcel and Julian and sets the play in motion.



Figure 10. Roland dreams of a bath. *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, BNF Fr 10135, fol. 144r.

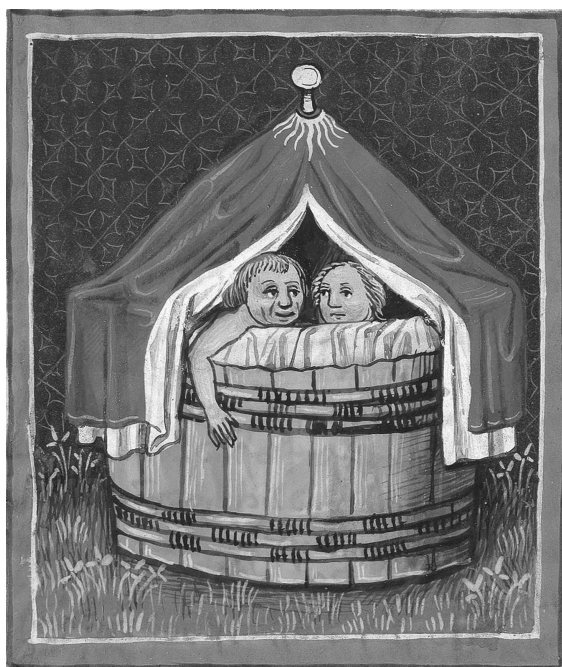


Figure 11. Licentious bath. From the Codex Schürstab. Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. C 54, fol. 44v. (Nürnberg, c. 1472.)

For my own part, I take the women at their word during the key moments of Scene 7. Françoise protests: “Professor Pylon, I can assure you that we’re perfectly capable of spicing things up on our own. . . . There’s no need for you to lay a hand on us” (*Maistre Macé, je vous proteste / Que de nous mesmes tant ferons / Qu’assés bien nou[s] nous sallerons / Sans que vous y mettiez la main*). The doc responds: “Now get salty or I’ll have to take matters into my own hands. Go salt yourselves!” (*Mais sallés-vous si bien aussi / Que soyés aigres, je vous prie / Ou il faudra que vous manie*). Next, Gilly chimes in that, when it comes to spice, they know what they’re doing. I believe her. I also believe that, when Professor Pylon goes on to demand that they salt away, Gilly delivers her reply with sarcasm: “Stay out of it. We’ve got this covered” (*Ne vous en chaille, pas n’y faudrons*). Indeed, few lines rival the withering irony of Gilly’s earlier assurance to Marcel in Scene 6: “You can trust us completely” (*Fiez-vous à nous hardiment*). The men *could have*—and *should have*—trusted their wives but, alas, they were too stupid to know it. In an inversion of the premise of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, any happily-ever-after is still elusive



Figure 12. Title page of *Discours facétieux des hommes qui font saller leurs femmes*. Rouen: Abraham Cousturier, 1600. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. 8-Z. Don-594 (577, 6, 4).

in that the initial consent of a malleable, obliging spouse is unlikely to be renewed. Pyrrhic victory notwithstanding, the strong implication is that a woman has total control over her own body and temperament.

And then there's this: the title page (Figure 12, above).

Here, a picture is worth a thousand words. A naked woman stands prayerfully in a tub as salt rains down upon her from the hands of two men. Since she is obviously not the Morton Salt Girl brandishing her umbrella, it behooves us to ask why the illustrator elected to resolve iconographically the very question that the play left unresolved linguistically. Given that the text is explicit that Marcel and Julian have left their wives alone with the Professor, who are these men? The two husbands? Is one of them Professor Pylon? And why does the artwork memorialize precisely what never happened in the play? Why does it subvert the whole point of the play? (Copy editor and

actor *extraordinaire* Michael Gnat ventures that it's called advertising: sex *sels*. Wish I'd thought of that one myself.)

At worst, the image is a potentially pornographic pictorialization of the husbandly fantasy in which a naked female body in a barrel is manhandled, thereby inviting further voyeurism (be it virtual or actual) from readers and theater audiences. At best, the frontispiece represents a complete misreading of the text: that is, if the illustrator read it at all. (I suspect that he did not, drawing his imagistic interpretation from the play's title alone, which may or may not have accompanied the original work.) On the darker side, the expression from American jurisprudence suits misogynistic complicity very well: "the hand of one is the hand of all." On the lighter side, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* tracks more like today's reality TV. Its medical fantasy suite is a fantasy sweet. Make that bittersweet.

For all those reasons, it is difficult to accept Faivre's critique of the "lack-luster" intertextual role swap of female swappers for, say, the male swappers of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*. It was predictable, he ventured, psychologically simplistic, and just not over-the-top enough. What it needed, he quipped, was a pinch of salt (*Répertoire*, 208–9). I say it needs no such thing.

Awaiting only the right audience, our play is seasoned just right, a real treat for the discerning palate. Even an all wrong message can be made all right if we follow Françoise's lead and reverse the male *fantasie* (TFMMA, v. 240). Thanks to some brilliant wordplay, which is even mirrored by irregular typesetting, the play issues a parting shot at all those male fantasizers with this stunning phrase: *En sa maison n'ozon s aller*. It is hard to disambiguate *n'osons saller* from *n'osons aller* (v. 287) because, depending on pronunciation, it means either, as for Rousse, "We dare not go home (*aller en sa maison*)" or "We dare not *salt* (*saller*) in our own home." Or both. Furthermore, the latter reading is consistent with one of the many pieces of proverbial wisdom that pepper the dialogue (below, § "Language"). As the saying goes, in "helping themselves to salt, the two men have helped themselves to sorrow." They used to have dessert but, in salting the sweet, they get their just deserts. When a marriage is hot, it mustn't be spiced up. That would be as tasteless as a farce.

Characters and Character Development

Let's start with the truly compatible couple, namely Marcel and Julian. Marcel—o happy man!—is ever so suggestible. Put him together with the paranoid Julian and it is a recipe for disaster that cannot be fixed by a pinch of

salt. Both men are financially well-off; both are senior in age to their wives; both are old hat and fuddy-duddy in their phraseology. Although both are capable of colloquialisms and slang under the stress of strong emotion, they favor a flowery style that is excessively polite and somewhat archaic. Whence my selection of retro musical clichés for them both. Both men are plagued by what lies beneath the surface of a life that strikes them as double-barreled. In a pinch, even the laudatory, erotic terms with which they praise their wives—*volupté*, *bravade*, and *piaphe*—have contradictory meanings, conveying tenderness, snuggling, and love connections as much they did troubles, hassles, posing, showing off, and demands for attention.⁸ Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between, not too sweet, not too salty, but just right: Marcel and Julian are exhausted and drained from all the sex that they are having. In a word, life is good but not good enough. And life is sweet. Too sweet.

If Marcel appears more clever than his friend, appearances can be deceiving. He too is over a barrel. He is swift enough to come up with the salting idea and to intuit correctly that the procedure will not end well; but he is stupid enough to go through with it anyway. He is perceptive enough to grasp that Gilly perhaps obeys him out of fear (Scene 1), but jealous enough to risk everything. He also has a number of linguistic tics: *à bref parler* (“in a word” or “long story short”). Otherwise, he is unrelentingly attuned to matters corporeal. This is a role that can be loaded up with mimed stage action, which has the added benefit of exploiting any remaining name recognition of the great Marcel Marceau. (Scene 2 features especially comic moments in which he has trouble shaking hands while balancing urine specimens.)

In contrast to Marcel, who lives in his body, Julian lives more in his head, where delusions of nongrandeur abound. He is disrespectful of the intelligence of women and panic-stricken that the sweet Françoise will give others easy access to her cookie jar. On occasion, he sounds like Toulà’s dad in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), who worried that his increasingly independent daughter would unwittingly become a drug courier due to her ignorance of the ways of the world.

Regarding the two loving, virtuous, sweetie-pie better halves: I thought of calling them Candy and Dulcie. I even thought of going (almost) medieval on the latter’s ass with Dulcinea. But these particular wives are not cookie-cutter characters. Besides, they already have names; so I’ve retained Gilly (Gillette) and Françoise. At first, one seems indistinguishable from the other as they manifest their exceptional docility, sisters in arms of Margie in #9, *Wife Swap*. Although perfectly healthy, they consent immediately to an

unnecessary and initially unnamed medical treatment. (Whereas Colin and Ebenezer of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, did likewise [Scenes 5 and 6], they actually *needed* a medical treatment, even though it's Jenny and Penny who ultimately take their medicine.) All bets are off, however, when the sleazy "doctor" attempts to lay hands on Gilly and Françoise. Pylon's proposition—a literal hand job (*manier*)—so shocks them with its obscenity that the pair leaves the clinic AMA (albeit—well-brought-up young ladies that they are—not without "tipping" him). The question is how to play their virtue. Doctor Jekyll and Ms. Hyde? The "sadder but wiser girl"[®] extolled in Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*? In line with the women's elegant, courteous language and behavior, my suggestion is to go with Stepford wives. In the beginning, butter wouldn't melt in their mouths; in the end—salt or no salt—still waters won't run so sweet.

In league with the illustrator of the *Discours facétieux*, Maistre Macé is primarily concerned with seeing women get naked. The doctor is always in, if not as far in as he'd like to be. He is a "philosopher from Brittany" and, as such, he speaks with a regional accent. (A Swiss accent would be ideal [below, § "Language"]; but almost any marked dialect will do.) I might have dubbed him Professor Pointer, given his propensity for pedagogy and his desire to "stick it in"; but, instead I've gone with Professor Pylon. It's helpful too that, in the vocabulary of construction, a *pylon* is a phallic object; plus, it looks like "python," which befits this Monty Pythonesque snake. He's not a very good listener either and, as one who likes to pile on not just salt but shit, he should go over well on college campuses. Whether he truly holds a PhD or is faking it, he is essentially dispensing medieval advice without a license. And yet, there is one thing about which he is totally honest: feign though he might his salty expertise, he cannot *unsalt*. Once the damage has been done, there is no sweetening back up. He can do but he can't undo. That's love, that's marriage, and that's theatrical performance.

Language

Marriage with a Grain of Salt boasts important metaphorical registers from courtly love, epic poetry, chivalry, and Christian or pre-Christian paradise; but obviously, it's mostly about the salt. The entire text is generously sprinkled throughout with salt-related idioms, puns, double entendres, aphorisms, and proverbs, starting with the key words and their derivatives for "salting" and "unsalting" (*saler* and *désaler*). Serendipitously, the English language

captures to perfection just what it is that jerky Marcel and Julian are trying to do to Gilly and Françoise: as one would do with ham, salt pork, or beef jerky, they wish to *cure* them. In Middle French, *saler* also implies the bad conduct of unscrupulous merchants (or “doctors”) who “overcharge”: we say “to take someone for a ride”; they say “to salt.” And—*quelle coincidence!*—both Francophones and Anglophones use “salty” as “piquant,” “risqué,” “dirty,” and—how could I resist?—“salacious.” For my money, the puns are spicier in French, where the connections are more apparent among *sale* (“dirty”), *saler* (“to salt”), and *salir* (“to sully”). Although *saler* and *salir* are conjugated differently, partial homonymy comes across in the first syllable. Thus, when Professor Pylon asks how he’s supposed to salt the two women if they won’t play along, all the early modern actor needed do was linger over that first syllable of *saler* in order to elicit audience suspicion that he was about to say “dirty up” (*salir*). He might say it like this, with a ridiculously languorous Swiss accent: *Comment est-ce que pourray / Vous saaaaaaaal-er?* (In contemporary French humor, the Swiss customs officer who asks if you have any purchases to declare remains the subject of a running joke: *Rien à déclaaaaaaaarer?*) A similar effect may be obtained for the first two syllables of *désaler*, where a slowed pronunciation would likewise create ambiguity between “unsalting” (*désaler*) and “breaking up a marital union” (*désallier*). (Remember that the French word for a wedding ring is an *alliance*.) And that’s only the beginning of this salty business.

Fortunately for us, much scrutiny has been paid to the global staple after the publication of Mark Kurlansky’s *Salt: A World History* (2002). Unfortunately for the play’s poetic set pieces, however, not much rhymes with “salt” in English; so thank heaven for “fault.” Even so, a smorgasbord of proverbs is available in both languages and proves particularly piquant in domestic economies. In my translation, I’ve drawn on virtually every salty expression that I could find, often from the realm of cooking. Here is only a small sampling of salt-infused adages with their more or less literal translations:

Répandre le sel porte malheur à la maison. (Spreading salt brings misfortune to a household.)

Beauté sans bonté, c’est comme une soupe sans sel. (Beauty without goodness is like a soup without salt.)

La femme serait un ragout suave si le diable n’y mettait ni sel ni poivre.
(A woman would be a tasty dish if the Devil weren’t always adding salt and pepper.)

Sel et sucre ne s'accordent pas. (Salt and sugar don't mix.)

Il est trop tard de mettre du sel, quand la viande sent déjà mauvais. (It's too late to salt once the meat stinks.)

Marie-toi, tu sauras combien te coute le sel. (Go on: get married and you'll soon know the price of salt.)

Sel et conseils ne se donnent qu'à qui les demande. (Help you to salt, help you to sorrow.)

Qui prend femme pour s'enrichir mange du sel pour se desaltérer. (Whoever takes a wife to get rich eats salt to quench his thirst.)

Consider, in relation to both that last one and the play's baptismal imagery, the aphorism invoked above about throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Now recall that *drinking* that liquid was part of the saintly activities of Catherine of Siena, who was known to have imbibed the pus and lice-infested postsoak bathwater of lepers (Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 171–72). From the saintly sublime to the titillatingly tasteless: that is the essence of farce to be extracted from this play. By dint of an almost blasphemous hankering after salt, Marcel and Julian have a thirst that will never be quenched.

There is one expression, though, from the lexicon of politics, economics, and the law that proved practically untranslatable and became my *point aux ânes* (à la #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*). It appears a single time only and almost by accident. When tendering payment to Professor Pylon, Julian says: “*Voilà dix francs / Sallés (suivant votre manière)*.” In all likelihood, this means: “Here are ten francs / Do what you do and salt away!”, which seems to be what Rousse understood when he added a period between the two verses. That reading is not unreasonable; but I see wordplay of enormous complexity. Rousse's reading still permits a double entendre, although it would entail Julian's more unlikely near simultaneous usage of both the *tu* form and the *vous* form, resulting in something like “so, *Monsieur*, salt 'em already, pal!” (*Sale-les!*). Not that that's impossible in farce (*FF*, 313–14). But the two-verse sequence of “*Voilà dix francs / Sallés (suivant votre manière)*” produces *francs sallés*. This looks and sounds an awful lot like “salty franc” (*franc salé*) and even a “salty Frank,” as in a “Frenchman” (*Franc salé*). And, on top of that, a *franc salé* was a financial term of art that denoted an exemption enjoyed by French noblemen from the dreaded tax levied on salt (later, *la gabelle*) and one that endured from the thirteenth century through the French Revolution. Indeed, the phrase almost tracks as a request from Pylon that the gentlemen pay up with their salt vouchers on the medieval black market.

(Salt-stamp fraud?) Seen from that perspective, this entire salty take on holy wedlock could be played as a recommendation, à la nouvelle cuisine, for a salt-free marital diet. But, wait! There's more.

Franc, of course, signifies "free" or "exempt," as in all those newly liberated bourgeois cities that were called *villes franches*. But it also signifies a Frank, as in the people of early France, along with a very particular citizen with a very particular connection to baptismal iconography. From Merovingian times, Clovis I himself, the King of the Franks (465–511)—and one frequently depicted as resplendent at his own nation-founding baptism—was a truly salty Frank; and I do mean that literally. He was a *franc salien* or "Salian Frank," a linguistic resonance that is surely more than coincidental. For one thing, Thoinot Arbeau chronicles a militaristic dance performed by such salty fellows, the *Saliens* (*Orchésographie*, 97–98). For another thing, although "Salian" technically derives from the people who lived in the region of the river "Sala" (as distinguished from the Ripuarian Franks), the Salian Franks are associated with an entire body of laws that is a sine qua non for historians: the monumental *lex salica* or "Salic law." Their codified principles established such tenets of medieval life as primogeniture (which excluded women from inheriting) as well as a detailed system of monetary penalties for multiple delicts, such as the theft of property, chattel, and foodstuffs.⁹ Salt was a precious commodity. So too were women, it seems, or should have been, or may yet be made to be. Today, production values and directorial decisions will determine whether the play is worth its salt.

Sets and Staging

Let me say that again: *sets and staging*. The near absence of this remarkable play from literary history might well be explained by its seemingly untheatrical title of *Discours facétieux*, facetious "speech" or "discourse." But, as we know from the long history of Basochial performance, a public speech was as inherently theatrical as it was entertaining (*ROMD*, 134–61). Consider the joyously ribald, satirical genre known as the *sermon joyeux* (a gay sermon or discourse), a veritable medieval equivalent of "solo performance." Whereas Faivre was convinced that *Marriage with a Grain of Salt* was a closet drama (*Répertoire*, 209), there is no need to closet the salacious gaiety of an ill-fated bromance. I'm with Rousse (*TFFMA*, 2: 555) that it really *played*, as I maintain that allegory so often did ("Allegory Plays"). The language of the subtitle alone calls for theatrical action: *lequel se joue à cinq personnages comme on peut le veoir à la page suivante* or "which is [to be] played by five actors, as you

can see on the next page.” And among the things *to be seen* are, in a setup akin to that of #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, at least three playing spaces: the two homes of the two couples, and the marketplace “office” of Professor Pylon. Each space hosts varied opportunities for mime and physical comedy.

Inasmuch as Scene 1 opens with an extensive description of adultery being all the rage, one might consider a preliminary, mimed ballet of bed-hopping and wife swapping: as long as it’s not by Gilly or Françoise. The town’s public spaces, teeming with iniquity, might contrast strikingly with more stark, domestic interiors of the well-heeled couples’ homes. Another dramaturgical choice to be made concerns the rural versus urban, cosmopolitan versus backwater feel (bathwater feel?) of the town.

Professor Pylon’s office should be situated amid the hustle-bustle of the market, populated by butchers, fishwives, and purveyors of produce galore, all of them sharing space with lawyers, notaries public, dentists, barbers, and long lines of eager clients. A pickle merchant would be particularly welcome, or some other artisan picking a peck of pickled peppers. Pylon requires an outside stump or podium from which to hawk his wares, a consultation area, a waiting room, and a separate, interior treatment room. (It would also be possible to stage him “consulting” at the marketplace and “treating” at a more remote location; or to craft his office as a tentlike structure that houses the greatest show on earth . . . or one helluva sideshow.) And then, there’s the elephant in the medieval room: the salting tub.

There was a similar choice to be made for the bathroom of #2, *The Shit-house*. Whether the tub is updated in production through basic or luxury plumbing, whether it retains its medieval iconographic look, this is where an indubitable metamorphosis occurs from sweet to salty. But where, when, and how? And where are Marcel and Julian during the cure? Have they been pacing in the waiting room the whole time, like expectant fathers? Have they gone to down some ale at the pub? Once the wives emerge, do the two couples go home?¹⁰ By means of interpolated stage directions, I’ve suggested that the spousal “reunions” be staged at the marketplace in full view of the community, the better for the audience to savor—as voyeuristically as the illustrator—the sweet and savory moral of the story.

Costumes and Props

The preeminent prop is the tub. Like a *lavoir*, it might be situated at the center of a medieval dirt-water town or, like the contemporary fixture, housed

in a palatial rest room. If it looks like a wine barrel or a beer keg, the audience will thirst all the more to drink it all in. A fiddle is also needed for the musical finale. It shall be onstage throughout, a convention of other farces, such as *Blind Man's Buff* (FF, 191–92). Items in Pylon's messy and cluttered office include Epsom salts, an overdetermined spice rack, assorted specimen jars for urine, and paraphernalia that would appropriately signal the trappings of wealth masquerading as actual wealth. The bonbon of choice could be SweetTarts; and, to enhance some of the puns, there could be a large poster of the Morton Salt Girl.

Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials (in order of appearance and indicated by © within the text)

"Me and My Shadow." By Dave Dreyer, Al Jolson, and Billy Rose. ASCAP Work ID: 430041671.

"I Got Rhythm." By George and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP Work ID: 390020627.

"Whatever Lola Wants." By Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. ASCAP Work ID: 530045862.

"Walk This Way." By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.

"La Vie en rose." By Mack David, Edith Gassion [Edith Piaf], and Luis Guiglielmi. ASCAP Work ID: 520012862.

"A Taste of Honey." By Ric Marlow and Robert Scott. ASCAP Work ID: 500013836.

"Every Breath You Take." By Sting. BMI Work #387308.

"Play the Game." By Freddie Mercury. BMI Work #1179701.

"The Game of Love." By Clint Ballard. ASCAP Work ID: 370078158.

"Sweet Surrender." By John Denver. ASCAP Work ID: 490326779.

"Love Me Tender." By Vera Matson and Elvis Presley. BMI Work #922784.

"She's Come Undone." By Randy Bachmann. BMI Work #1572184.

"Turn, Turn, Turn." By Pete Seeger. BMI Work #1521867.

"Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves." By Ann Lennox and David Allan Stewart. ASCAP Work ID: 790710124.

"Sadder but Wiser Girl." By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 490002029.

"No Salt on Her Tail." By John Phillips. ASCAP Work ID: 440063352.

"Sugar, Sugar." By Jeff Barry and Andy Kim. BMI Work #1426093.

“Dat’s Love.” [“Habanera” from *Carmen Jones*, as adapted from Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*.] By Roger Russell Bennett, Georges Bizet, Ludovic Halevy, and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 40005430.
“Brown Sugar.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #155533.

[Possible opening music]¹¹

[Scene 1]

MARCEL *begins*

Well if it isn’t my good buddy! Hey, hey, hey, Julian, what do you say?

JULIAN

I say: Just call me “the laughing philosopher.” Marcel, I’m a regular Democritus. I tell you, pal, I’ve got not a soul to tell my troubles to[©] because I’ve got no troubles!

MARCEL

How’s that again, neighbor?

JULIAN

I’ve always got a big smile on my face. What can I tell you? Old Man Trouble, you won’t find him ’round my door![©] I’m livin’ the dream.

MARCEL

Oh my God, Jules, same here! Don’t find him ’round my door[©] either. Things are great at my place. Never better because, with *my* wife, my word is law.

JULIAN

And I’m living happily ever after. Whatever Julie wants, Julie gets.[©] And whatever *I* want is what *she* wants. She can’t do enough for me. And, when I’m in the mood, all I have to do is get started with a little kiss[©] and she’s all over me. Like this.[©]

MARCEL

Me too! It's all hand-to-hand at my place, and I don't mean combat. *C'est la vie en rose:*[®] Like manna from heaven, kisses much sweeter than wine,[®] sweet as sugar.¹² I'd be hard pressed to imagine being married to anybody sweeter. If only I'd thought of it myself!¹³

JULIAN

My wife treats me like a king, waits on me hand and foot, attends to my every need. Why, if she's gone even one hour without seeing me, she gets into such a state that you'd think she was dying of a broken heart. But once I come through the door, all better! She rushes right up to greet me, and then she's on her knees with the sweetest little curtsy you ever did see. I swear: people would think I'm royalty or something. At least a baron, for sure.

MARCEL

When mine irons my white shirt for church, she actually kisses it before she hands it over all nice and warm. And then she puts on my shoes and stockings, gets me all dressed up, does my hair. She can't do enough for me. Long story short: I think she's scared o' makin' me mad. And, then, in the sweetest little voice, she goes: "Have a good day, Marcel, my darling." Is that adorable or what?

JULIAN

Adorable it is. In word and deed. Every move she makes, every breath she takes:[®] it's heaven on earth, *mon ami*, and that's the God's honest truth. Then again. . . .
There's such a thing as too much of a good thing. A woman can't be *too* sweet.

MARCEL

I'm afraid you'll have to tell me what you mean by that. How do you figure?

JULIAN

Good God, man, it happens all the time! Imagine some joker were to come around tryin' too play around: she'd just play along. And that's the game of love.^{®14}

MARCEL

Touché. You make an excellent point. All some stranger would have to do is ask for a little sugar, and it's sweet surrender!®

JULIAN

No two ways about it. She'd be powerless to resist.

MARCEL

We can't have Sugar givin' it out so sweet.¹⁵

JULIAN

You can say that again. But what are we going to do about it?

MARCEL

We're gonna head off right now to see Dr. Pylon, the great philosopher. [He's got a PhD and everything.] Maybe he'll be good enough to spice 'em up. A pinch o' salt oughta do it.

JULIAN

Praise the Lord and bless my soul! If he only could!

[A double pantomime might ensue in both domestic spaces as each husband arranges for the diagnostic material for any premodern medical visit. Each man finds a surreptitious means of collecting a urine specimen from each wife, ideally in fairly unwieldy receptacles. When the two men meet up again, Marcel will be charged with carrying both receptacles, leading to more physical comedy and possible spillage. They then approach Professor Pylon in town.]

[Scene 2]

[Lights up at market near the "office" of Professor Pylon]

PROFESSOR PYLON

[To the audience, ex parte] [As I was sayin', folks:] Want to make your way in this world? A man's gotta study philosophy *and* magic and, whatever you do, just put on a show! Act like a philosopher! [Hell, play

one on TV! . . . which hasn't been invented yet, but don't let that stop you!]¹⁶ Or at least put the fear o' God into your students! Suffer the little children. That's how you make some serious money [or so they tell me. Maybe at other universities. . .]. Fake it till you make it, boys and girls! [*Jingling his purse*] And you can take *that* to the bank. [But we haven't been properly introduced. They call me Professor Pylon, PhD. And don't you be sayin' "piled higher and deeper." Now listen up, 'cause I'm fixin' to pile it on.]¹⁷

MARCEL

Professor Pylon! There you are!

[As the two men approach, Julian hands his urine specimen to Marcel, the better to shake the Professor's hand. This leaves poor Marcel trying—unsuccessfully—to balance both specimen jars. Additional comedy resides in the Prof's apparent inability to see the diagnostic tools right under his nose. Perhaps he is distracted by lovely passersby.]

PROFESSOR PYLON

Greetings and salutations, my brothers, good *fratribus, fraters*, frat-boys! [And, *hic, haec, hoc. Huius, huius, huius. Horum harum horum!* Whore 'em, harem, whore 'em!]¹⁸

JULIAN

We'll get straight to the point if we may, Professor. We're here on a very delicate matter. We were wondering whether you might cure our wives of a very strange malady.

PROFESSOR PYLON

No prob. Just drop off a urine specimen! I'll have 'em up and runnin' in no time. No rotten apples spoilin' your bunch.¹⁹ Cure whatever the fuck ails 'em, you bet your sweet ass!

[They attempt to hand him the samples, but Professor Pylon signals with his hand that some payment is in order. Marcel has some trouble balancing the urine bottles as he tries to shake the Professor's extended hand.]

MARCEL

Thanks, Prof, I've got my hands full here.²⁰

PROFESSOR PYLON

Okey-dokey, then, gents, spill. [*Perhaps Marcel does.*]

Now, *entre nous*: What seems to be the trouble with your wives?

JULIAN

If you must know, they're too sweet. And, if some pretty boy were to come around tryin' to sweet-talk 'em into bed, they'd never be able to resist. That's right: delivered right into evil.²¹

MARCEL

You can say that again. We can't have some dude stickin' his hand in the cookie jar!

PROFESSOR PYLON

No, no, we certainly can't have that. So what's the story? [*À la Carnac the Magnificent?*] Wait! Don't tell me, lemme guess! They're too sweet, right?

JULIAN

That's what we just said. There's the rub and that's the story.

PROFESSOR PYLON

Hells bells, boys! That's even worse than livin' with a bitch on wheels!²²

MARCEL

So what can we do? There must be a cure.

PROFESSOR PYLON

All they need is a pinch of salt!

JULIAN

What do you mean salt? It leaves a bitter taste in your mouth. We want *sweet* and sour, not *hot* and sour.

PROFESSOR PYLON

Salt, I tell you. Works every time, as long as you season 'em just right. Know how, when your food's too sweet—soup, cabbage, meat—you gotta pile on the salt?

JULIAN

But how do you salt a woman?

[Marcel is still struggling with the two urine specimens, which he continues to spill.]

PROFESSOR PYLON

I'm trying to explain if you'd just put a lid on it!
How indeed, you might ask. And well you may. That's for me to know and you to find out. *[He gestures again that payment will be required.]*

[Fumbling for cash, Julian bumps Marcel, which leads to more spillage.]

MARCEL

So can you salt 'em or what?
[The Professor makes the same gesture for a handout.] Yeah, yeah, if the price is right. *[Marcel fumbles for cash, leading to yet more spillage.]*

PROFESSOR PYLON

Sure thing. Bring 'em on down and I'll spice 'em right up. I guarantee: they'll be salty enough to hold their own against all comers!

JULIAN

Would two hundred do the trick? I believe that's the going rate. So get your salt and pile it on! You can do mine front and back. Get both sides. We've just gotta reduce that sugar content. Try not to hurt her—we love 'em tender[®]—but not *that* tender. And we got the legal tender to back it up.²³ *[He hands Pylon the money.]*

PROFESSOR PYLON

[Gesturing to Marcel for payment] Bring 'em right here to me. Bring 'em on in.

MARCEL

[*Handing him money*] I'm gonna go get mine right now. [*Fumbling in his pocket for a tip, he hands Professor Pylon a urine specimen.*] Wait—a little somethin' extra, for a drink.

PROFESSOR PYLON

[*Aghast*] Step lively, boys, take it away!
As for me, it's back to the salt mines! I'll get everything all ready.

[*Marcel finally finds a spot to set the urine specimens down. Professor Pylon disappears into his "office."*]

[Scene 3]

JULIAN

I can't believe it! Our wives are gonna be just right, seasoned to perfection. Sugar and spice and everything nice.

MARCEL

[*Indicating the audience*] I kind of have the impression that people are laughing at us. You?

JULIAN

Nah. The Prof knows what he's doing. It's not like he's an ABD.

[*Julian and Marcel head back to their respective homes.*]

[Scene 4]

[*Action alternates between the two households. One couple might freeze while the other plays their scene; or lights might be dimmed on one household as action unfolds at the other.*]

[*At the home of Marcel and Gilly, Gilly is busy ironing.*]

MARCEL

Oh, Gilly-Bean?

GILLY

What can I do for you, my dearest, darling Marcel?

MARCEL

[*To the audience*] I mean really? Has she no pride? Just look at that sweet little face. Too sweet if you ask me!

Come on over here by me, sugar. Hop on. Closer . . . closer. . .

GILLY

Whatever you desire. Your wish is my command. [*She straddles him and swoons.*] Let nothing ever come between us.

[Scene 5]

[*At the home of Julian and Françoise*]

JULIAN

Françoise? Where are you, sweetie?

[*Françoise might enact the type of greeting earlier described and kneel before him.*]

FRANÇOISE

Here I am, Julian, darling.

JULIAN

Come along quickly now, honey, you hear me?

If you must know, I'm taking you to see a specialist. He's gonna fix you right up. Just what the doctor ordered. Pull out all the stops.

FRANÇOISE

I'll do as you please, dear. I believe you know my record.

[*The two couples meet up and head back together to the "office" of Professor Pylon.*]

[Scene 6]

[*At or outside the "Doctor's office"*]

MARCEL

Here we are again, Professor. We're back, and we've brought our wives.

JULIAN

So, if you'd be so kind as to attend to these ladies the way we talked about.

PROFESSOR PYLON

Not to worry, gents. I'll do right by 'em and then some. [*He motions toward the treatment room.*] Go right on in, ladies, I'll be right with you.

MARCEL

We'll leave you girls alone now. Just be sure you do whatever he says. Doctor's orders. No questions asked.

GILLY

We'll follow his instructions to the letter. You can trust us completely.

[*The Professor, Gilly, and Françoise move to the examination room. During the "consultation," Marcel and Julian have plenty of opportunity for mime. They might pace anxiously in the "waiting room" or step out and tour the marketplace to pass the time, remaining relatively close by.*]

[Scene 7]

[*Inside the "treatment room"*]

PROFESSOR PYLON

Okay, girls, quit foolin' around. Out o' those clothes! I gotta work on you. Come on, strip! I need you bare-assed if I'm gonna do you.²⁴

FRANÇOISE

I'm not sure I follow: What do you mean "do" us?

PROFESSOR PYLON

Go on, strip! And don't gimme no trouble. Now be quick about it!

GILLY

What's the meaning of this?

FRANÇOISE

I'll do no such thing.

GILLY

Nor will I. I have no intention of "stripping."

PROFESSOR PYLON

[*As lecherously as possible*] So how am I supposed to salt you?²⁵

GILLY

What do you mean "salt"?

FRANÇOISE

Salt? That's certainly news to me. I never heard of such a thing!

PROFESSOR PYLON

S-A-L-T [Sex At Lunch Time, bitches!²⁶] What do you think your husbands brought you here for? [*He tries to remove their clothes.*]

GILLY

Well, I never! And I'll thank you to keep your hands to yourself. You've got some nerve.

PROFESSOR PYLON

[I'm a hands-on kinda guy.] And what the hell? I made a deal! Gonna spice you right up! All you need's a pinch o'—

FRANÇOISE

Not before we know what they meant by that. This doesn't sound entirely on the up and up.

PROFESSOR PYLON

[*Puckering up*] It's all because you're sooooo sweet. And, to remove all that sweetness, you'll need to be salted. [*He pats her on the ass.*] Just to be on the safe side.

GILLY

Frankie, can you believe this? We're too sweet for those two fools? They must be dreaming.

FRANÇOISE

Here's an idea: turnabout is fair play. They don't want sweet? Let's go for tart. It'll serve 'em right. We'll show no mercy. From this day forward, to have and to scold.

GILLY

You're on, girl! Now and forever, I'll be a lot meaner. And, since I've set my mind to it, I'm gonna give that husband o' mine what for!

FRANÇOISE

Professor Pylon, I can assure you that we're perfectly capable of spicing things up on our own. We'll be plenty salty enough, thank you very much. There's no need for you to lay a hand on us.²⁷

GILLY

Cross my heart and hope to . . . [*Both women begin to leave but notice that Pylon, per usual, has his hand out for a tip.*] Oh for heaven's . . . fine! Here's a little something. Go buy yourself a drink.

PROFESSOR PYLON

Off with you, then. And don't you be turnin' into no pillars o' salt, now, girls! Now get salty or I'll have to take matters into my own hands. Go salt yourselves!

GILLY

Stay out of it. We've got this covered. [And, by the way, Prof: salt you!]²⁸

FRANÇOISE

One thing's for sure: we'll never set foot in this place again.²⁹

[*The two wives head home.*]

[Scene 8]

MARCEL

Look! Here they come! Girls are lookin' fit as a fiddle.

[*Gilly grabs the fiddle and both wives begin beating their husbands.*]

GILLY

What are *you* lookin' at, motherfuckers? Take this fiddle and shove it up your ass! Shame on you! What the hell kinda stunt were you two jokers tryin' to pull? Goddamn dirtbags! You wanted salty? How's this? Salty enough for you?

FRANÇOISE

Heartless jackasses! What the hell's wrong with you? Jerks! You hand us over to some sleazeball so he can salt us like pork belly? Take your tripe and shove it!

MARCEL

If you'd be so kind as to . . . Please, forgive us our trespasses. Sorry about that.

JULIAN

It's no big deal. We didn't mean any harm.

GILLY

No harm, is it? We'll give you harm in a minute! Let's go, Frankie: we'll beat 'em to a pulp! Salt, my ass. [What was that in the script earlier?] We'll do you "front and back!"³⁰ Get both sides! [*She demonstrates on the men.*] Gut and backside!

FRANÇOISE

Come to think of it, what I really feel like doing is . . . beatin' their asses so good they'll remember it for the rest o' their lives! [Forgive 'em their trespasses? No fuckin' way!]

GILLY

Serves 'em right! Now get your ass ready, Marcel!

FRANÇOISE

You too, Julian! [*Beating him*] Take that! How's that for a little zest? Am I salty enough for you now?³¹

JULIAN

Lord have mercy, woman! I give up! I'll never have you salted again!

GILLY

Your turn, Marcel! Come on and take your lumps, and I don't mean sugar!

MARCEL

Lord have mercy, woman! I give up!

FRANÇOISE

God damn it! Listen to these assholes! They farted! Break wind again and I'll break your ass!

JULIAN

Lord have mercy, woman! I give up! No more salt, I promise!

FRANÇOISE

I got plenty more where that came from! Let's see what else they got to say!

[*The men scream, squeal, and moan.*]

GILLY

What was that, boys? We can't hear you! [Pass the salt, is it?] This little party's just gettin' started.

[*Doubled version in song, dance, or rap begins here.*]

FRANÇOISE

You want some salt? You want some spice?

JULIAN

Have mercy, woman, please! Play nice!
I'll never ask for salt again.

GILLY

Marcel! It's tax time: pay the price!

MARCEL

Have mercy, woman, please! Play nice!

FRANÇOISE

Those assholes farted! That's not nice!
[*Wielding her stick*] You better not let loose again!

JULIAN

Have mercy, woman, please! Play nice!
I'll never ask for salt again!

FRANÇOISE

Let's whack those two comedians
They ever wanna bitch again.

GILLY

[We'll really make 'em scream. Amen.] Had a little fun at our expense,
did they?

[*Doubled version ends here.*]

[*The two women pause momentarily, exhausted from their efforts, giving the two husbands an opportunity to escape.*]

MARCEL

I don't know about you but . . . let's get the salt outta here!

[Scene 9]

[Having made a run for it, Marcel and Julian review the situation from a safe distance.]

MARCEL

[Gee, do you think we mighta screwed up? We got sourpusses.] We shoulda held the goddamn salt!

JULIAN

Damn sweet-talkin' snake oil salesman!³² He did this on purpose! Pulled a fast one and spoiled everything!

MARCEL

Let's go right back there and tell him a thing or two.

[Scene 10]

[Back at Professor Pylon's]

JULIAN

How now, Professor Pylon? You want to tell us why you salted our wives wrong?

MARCEL

Just wait till word gets out about this! I'll have you know they just beat the crap out of us. This is not exactly what we had in mind.

PROFESSOR PYLON

We'll just have to add another pinch o' salt.

JULIAN

What the hell? They're too damn salty as it is!

MARCEL

You said a mouthful. And so did they. My ears are still ringing!

PROFESSOR PYLON

What do you mean? They're not salty enough?

JULIAN

Au contraire! They're plenty damn salty! Please: you've gotta change 'em back. On the double!

PROFESSOR PYLON

I reckon you're gonna have to ask them first.

MARCEL

We really blew it. What the hell were we thinking? And you better not trick us again!

PROFESSOR PYLON

If you could just wet 'em down and let 'em soak for a bit. . . . Most likely, they'll sweeten right back up. Just rinse and repeat.

JULIAN

Are you nuts? They'd never put up with it! We're scared to go home. They'll just rub salt in our wounds.³³

PROFESSOR PYLON

I don't know nothin' bout unsaltin' no women!

JULIAN

You shoulda minded your own goddamn business! Go to hell!

*[Doubled version begins here.]*³⁴

PROFESSOR PYLON

For sweetie pies, I add a pinch of salt!
You can't *unsalt*, 'cause, once you salt, you're done!

JULIAN

The hell with you. This whole thing is your fault!

PROFESSOR PYLON

For sweetie pies, I add a pinch o' salt!

MARCEL

Just spit it out! Go on, long story short:
Is this what's left until our days are done?

PROFESSOR PYLON

For sweetie pies, I add a pinch o' salt!
You can't *unsalt*, 'cause, once you salt, you're done!

[*Doubled version ends here.*]

JULIAN

I think it's fair to say we've come undone.[®]
[*To the audience*] Will you look at us now? This is some fine mess we've gotten ourselves into. And we're just gonna have to put up with it without a single complaint. So much for our just desserts.
Ladies and Gentlemen, any man out there who thinks life isn't sweet enough with a real honey of a wife who does right by him: he deserves whatever he gets, as you've just seen. [Remember the old proverb: "Help you to salt, help you to sorrow"? No? Okay, fine: just remember this. {*He walks over to pick up the fiddle.*}
To everything, turn, turn, turn. There is a seasoning.[®]]

[*Here begins the doubled version set to fiddle music.*]³⁵

Ladies and gents, we're stuck! Look what we wrought.
We can't complain, or else we might get caught.
[Our wives were sweeties! Why'd we make a fuss?
I think there must be something wrong with us.]
Messieurs, you got a wife who's right as rain?
Put up with her! It's best not to complain!
And if you've got a wife who's worth her salt,
[Don't spice 'er up. Your fate is all your fault!
So if you have a yen for *fleur de sel*.
Just hold the salt! Avoid a living hell.]
Unless . . . you take this with a grain of salt,

Our play, I mean. We hope you don't find fault
With what we've done 'cause now we're on our way
Bye-bye! We'll live to salt another day.
[You want one more? Maestro! Take it away.]

[*Double version ends here.*]

[*Possible closing music*³⁶]

The END

Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials

If I'm stressed out, you might tell me to "let it be." On 22 May of any given year, you might wish me a happy birthday. (Thank you.) At a New Year's Eve party, you might gather around the piano and sing show tunes. When you do those things, you are not required to investigate licensing fees for the Beatles song, pay royalties to Mildred J. Hill and Patty Smith Hill, or clear your drunken concert with Stephen Sondheim. In fact, thanks to a momentous legal ruling on 22 September 2015 by U.S. District Court Judge George H. King, no one will ever have to pay for "The Happy Birthday" song again!¹ And good luck, by the way, finding the author of "Auld Lang Syne."

Obviously, in the Middle Ages—a time when the very word for author (*auctor*) harkened back to the practice of making ample use of the words of prior wielders of authority (*auctoritas*)—no medieval farceur was concerned about copyright as we understand its protections today (although, in *Poets, Patrons, and Printers*, my colleague Cynthia J. Brown has made a distinguished career of studying the emergence of those protections in late medieval France). No playwright was checking in with the local troubadour to clear permissions for *Puys qu'il est beau à mon plaisir*. And the same held true when the characters of #7, *Holy Deadlock*, broke into a rousing chorus of that very song (*TFFMA*, 2: v. 143), or when they recited a few lines from a poem, or parodied a local celebrity. All was fair in love, war, and what we now call plagiarism. All use was fair use. Fair enough.

Oh, what a difference a couple of centuries make!

As in "*The Farce of the Fart*" and *Other Ribaldries*, I dub the ubiquitous farcical borrowings from medieval song a "musical cliché" and, lest the term offend, allow me to explain that choice anew. I mean no disrespect to any tuneful medieval offering, nor do I imply that there is anything trite or vacuous about the music that I will be referencing when following the plays' ex-

tensive musical references. Far from it. Even though “cliché” sounds pejorative nowadays, it is the very function of art to infuse with new meaning even the most rote uses of language. If anything, the innumerable musical intertexts of farce demonstrate that medieval song was influential enough to have invigorated not only theatrical works but the Middle French language itself. For example, we know that this sort of thing happened in other plays with other tag lines that were spoken, chanted, or sung.² Thus, the French still say *revenons à nos moutons*, a line from the famous trial scene of the fifteenth-century *Pathelin*. The expression no longer denotes crazy, legalistic babble about stolen sheep as it did in that farce; but it still means “let’s get back to the point.”³ I submit that the same thing happened regularly with popular lyrics. They too entered the language. They certainly entered the language of farce.

Therefore, musical analogies are imperative to any truly faithful translation. The challenge for any contemporary translator is how to fashion a comparative musical tool that will protect both the original meaning(s) of the medieval originals and the proprietary interests of postmedieval musicians, lyricists, and performers. For purposes of scholarly understanding, and as I did in “*The Farce of the Fart*” (401–10), I have adopted the practices described below.

In translational support of the spirit of the present dozen plays, I make a large number of time-sensitive suggestions regarding postmedieval songs, rhymes, or ditties that seem to capture the medieval song in question. For the most part, I have taken to gesturing toward the *titles only* of a song or two that strike me as rough, translational analogues for what is happening in a given play. I recognize, moreover, that, as familiar as my musical allusions are to me, they are unlikely to stand the test of time. Chances are that my now geriatric recollection of my parents’ and grandparents’ songs from the 1920s, ’30s, or ’40s are already lost on younger readers. Nevertheless, I share my idiosyncratic intuitions, fully cognizant that everyone will see, hear, imagine, or perform something just as idiosyncratic to him or her. I do so in order to encourage actors, directors, and readers to identify music and lyrics that will elicit the right equivalencies for *them* (rap, hip-hop, electronic music, sounds I’ve never heard, or—who knows?—classical). Please consider all the song titles unscripted musings that it seemed dramaturgically prudent not to set in stone. In endeavoring to extend the life of these translations as they age, I have quite deliberately elected *not* to “script” the music officially. Like language, music evolves.

All that said, I cannot emphasize this strongly enough: any theater company wishing to include music in a performance of these translations must seek and obtain the rights to now-copyrighted materials. This is absolutely mandatory and legally required. Failure is not an option; and lack of response from the copyright holder is not an excuse for assuming consent. Indeed, one of the purposes of this Appendix is to facilitate the proper acquisition of rights. Besides, as a lifelong fan of many of the songs mentioned, I am happy to publicize the work of the gifted lyricists and composers who created them.

Each time a song, lyric, or performance appears in these translations, I signal its presence with the copyright symbol (©), as a reminder to check whether copyright applies. This decision emerged for two reasons. On one hand, public response to my previous anthology of farces (*FF*) featured a bit of running joke about my incessant boilerplate warnings about seeking permissions. On the other hand, use of the copyright symbol actually streamlines the process in such a way that musical references are both less redundant and more rigorous. Normally, this identifying feature will appear for the title of a given song; less frequently, for a line from elsewhere in the song, the latter of which might well have morphed somewhat from its original language (as so often happens when popular lyrics enter the language in the form of variants and paraphrases [above, “About This Translation,” § “Prose, Verse, Music”]). Also, to avoid ambiguity or confusion, I use the copyright symbol even for songs that are likely not subject to copyright at all: “anonymous” or “traditional” folksongs, spirituals, ballads, lullabies, nursery rhymes, or lieder in the public domain (in which case, I give the dates of composition, if known). That is because, today, *specific renditions* of anonymous songs may indeed be designated the protected intellectual property of the recording artist. In addition, witness the 2015 ruling in favor of the estate of Marvin Gaye against Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams for some \$7.4 million (later reduced to \$3.2 million for, shall we say, having “blurred the lines” of their appropriation of “Got to Give It Up”©). My caveat here is that, consistent with oral performance traditions, a musical catchphrase can enter the English language so completely that we no longer realize that it originated in a copyrighted song. Think, for instance, about the way we bandy about Shakespearean quotes, perhaps unaware that, say, the turn of phrase “sound and fury signifying nothing” appears in *Macbeth*. Likewise, if you’re comforting a friend by telling her that “breaking up is hard to do,” you might not even *know* the Neil Sedaka hit by that name, which he cowrote with Howard Greenfield. It’s a safe bet to say that, for the English language of the twenty-first century, I

might have missed a few song lyrics that have wended their way into popular discourse. It's a sure thing that, when it comes to the kindred phenomenon of musical clichés in a now defunct language like Middle French, I've missed a great many. Count on it. But also count on musical undertones and overtones in every play of *"Holy Deadlock"* and *Further Ribaldries*.

Should any theater company wish to follow up on my thoughts about the medieval spirit of these farces by inserting musical materials or interludes into a performance—or even to perform one of these farces *as a musical*—the detailed list below is designed to help with the first steps toward obtaining permission for use. Do note that rights may be held by lyricists, composers, performers, corporations, and other entities besides, such that, for any given musical selection it may be necessary to seek separate permission from separate entities for the rights to perform lyrics, melodies, signature interpretations, and the like. In some situations, if I happen to know of a copyright history that is fraught with legal peril, I flag that in a note; but all copyrights constitute legal protections that must be respected absolutely. In each and every instance where I give the title of a song, I indicate the professional registry—there may be more than one—that administers the rights to that song today, along with the official identification numbers assigned by ASCAP (www.ascap.com), BMI (www.bmi.com), MPL Music Publishing (www.mplcommunications.com), and SESAC (www.sesac.com). Since I am concerned in this translation with medieval *language*—as opposed to those largely irrecoverable melodies—I name the writers only of the music and lyrics of the songs in question (if known), as opposed to the artist or artists who might have popularized a specific song (unless that artist was also the songwriter). At no time, moreover, do I appropriate a particular artist's trademark interpretation of a particular song. In terms of presentation, whereas songwriters are commonly listed in order of priority of contribution, I simplify matters by listing them, as in the registries, in alphabetical order. For ease of recognition, I sometimes cite lyricists by the names to which we are most accustomed: Buddy Holly rather than Charles Hardin Holly, Freddie Mercury rather than Farrokh Bulsara.

Finally, it bears reemphasizing in no uncertain terms that *before contemplating production, theater practitioners are required to investigate and resolve any and all issues of copyright, fair use, or royalty arrangements related to the following copyrighted materials to which I make scholarly references in this anthology.*

"Afternoon Delight." By William Danoff. ASCAP Work ID: 310147203.
 "After the Lovin'." By Alan Bernstein and Richard Adam Ziegler. ASCAP
 Work ID: 310145974.
 "Ain't It a Shame." By Dave Bartholomew and Antoine "Fats" Domino.
 BMI Work #13953.
 "Ain't That a Kick in the Head?" By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen.
 ASCAP Work ID: 310017273.
 "All My Trials." By Joan Baez. ASCAP Work ID: 310153330.
 "All Night Long." By Lionel Richie. ASCAP Work ID: 310227957.
 "Alouette." Traditional.
 "Amazing Journey." By Peter Townshend. BMI Work #33852.
 "Anything You Can Do." By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 310056043.
 "At the Hop." By John Medora, Arthur Singer, and David White. BMI
 Work #62670.
 "Auprès de ma blonde." Traditional.
 "Baby Face." By Harry Akst and Benny Davis. ASCAP Work
 ID: 320002564.
 "Bad." By Michael Jackson. BMI Work #78860.
 "Bad Boy." By Larry Dermer, Joe Galdo, and Rafael Vigil. BMI Work
 #79088.
 "Beast of Burden." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. ASCAP Work
 ID: 320231165.
 "Bells Are Ringing." By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne.
 ASCAP Work ID: 320035636.
 "Be Still My Beating Heart." By Sting. BMI Work #93445.
 "The Best of My Love." By Glenn Frey, Don Henley, and J. D. Souther.
 ASCAP Work ID: 320186303.
 "The Best Things in Life Are Free." By Lew Brown, B. G. De Sylva, and Ray
 Henderson. ASCAP Work ID: 32004106.
 "The Bible Tells Me So." By Dale Evans. ASCAP Work ID: 320044331.
 "Big Spender." By Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields. ASCAP Work
 ID: 320137955.
 "Bitch." By Meredith Brooks and Shelly Peiken. BMI Work #4047070.
 "Both Sides Now." By Joni Mitchell. ASCAP Work ID: 360095229.
 "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do." By Howard Greenfield and Neil Sedaka.
 BMI Work #148908.
 "Bridge over Troubled Water." By Paul Simon. BMI Work #150264.

- "Brown Sugar." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #155533.
- "Burning Love." By Dennis Linde. BMI Work #160887.
- "Bye-Bye, Baby." ["Bye, Bye, Baby (Baby Goodbye)."] By Bob Crewe and Robert Gaudio. BMI Work #165170.
- "Cabaret." By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #167242.
- "Can't Buy Me Love." By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work ID: 330138248.
- "C'est Magnifique." By Cole Porter. ASCAP Work ID: 330000583.
- "Chains." By Gerald Goffin and Carole King. BMI Work #195934.
- "Change Is Gonna Come." By Sam Cooke. BMI Work #197510.
- "Changes." By David Bowie. BMI Work #198130.
- "Cinnamon Girl." By Neil Young. BMI Work #215090.
- "Come & Get It." By Esther Dean, Mikkel Eriksen, and Tor Hermansen. ASCAP Work ID: 885158038.
- "Company." By Stephen Sondheim. ASCAP Work ID: 330178302.
- "Crazy in Love." By Shawn Carter, Richard Christopher Harrison, Beyoncé Knowles, and Eugene Booker Record. BMI Work #6483135.
- "Crazy Love." By Russell Young. ASCAP Work ID: 330259797.
- "Dance of the Cuckoos." By Marvin T. Hatley. ASCAP Work ID: 340004686.
- "Dang Me." By Roger Miller. BMI Work #275944.
- "Dat's Love." ["Habanera" from *Carmen Jones*, as adapted from Georges Bizet's *Carmen*.] By Roger Russell Bennett, Georges Bizet, Ludovic Halevy, and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 40005430.
- "Day-O." ["The Banana Boat Song."] Traditional Jamaican folk song.
- "Disco Inferno." By Leroy Green and Tyrone Kersey. BMI Work #306148.
- "The Diva Song." By Sarah Silverman.⁴
- "Don't Rain on My Parade." By William Crystal, Allan Sachs, Marc Shaiman, David Steinberg, Jule Styne, Burch Valanch, and Robert Wuhl. BMI Work #2337047.
- "Doublemint Gum [jingle]." By Steve Karmen. ASCAP Work ID: 570017442.
- "Ebony and Ivory." By Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work ID: 350091377.
- "Edelweiss." By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. ASCAP Work ID: 350007977.
- "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen." Papageno's aria from *The Magic Flute*. By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1791).
- "Erlkönig." By Franz Schubert (1815).

- "Every Breath You Take." By Sting. BMI Work #387308.
- "Everything's Coming Up Roses." By Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne.
ASCAP Work ID: 350034303.
- "Fat-Bottomed Girls." By Brian Harold May. BMI Work #406587.
- "Fie on Goodness." By Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe. ASCAP Work ID: 360020013.
- "Forever and Ever, Amen." By Paul L. Overstreet and Donald Alan Schlitz.
ASCAP Work ID: 360231698.
- "Fuck You [FU]." By Christopher Brown, Thomas Callaway, Peter Hernandez, Philip Lawrence, and Ari Levine. ASCAP Work ID: 881948333.
- "The Game of Love." By Clint Ballard. ASCAP Work ID: 370078158.
- "Get Off [of] My Cloud." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #463889.
- "Get over It." By Glenn Frey and Don Henley. BMI Work #2002781.
- "Gimme Some Lovin'." By Spencer Davis, Muff Winwood, and Steve Winwood. BMI Work #469118.
- "The Girl Is Mine." By William Adams, Keith Harris, and Michael Jackson.
ASCAP Work ID: 371868552.
- "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." By Victor Carstarphen, Robert Hazard, Cyndi Lauper, Gene McFadden, Richard David Morel, John Cavadus Whitehead. ASCAP Work ID: 372137750.
- "Git Along, Little Dogies!" Traditional.
- "Glamorous." By William Adams, Christopher Bridges [Ludacris], Stacy Ferguson [Fergie], Jamal Jones, Micaiah Raheem, and Elvis Williams.
BMI Work #8561329.
- "God Bless America." By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 370029559.
- "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." Traditional.
- "Goldigger." By Kanye West. BMI Work #7583980.
- "Good Golly, Miss Molly." By Robert Alexander Blackwell and John S. Marascalco. BMI Work #494171.
- "Good Lovin'." By Rudy Clark and Arthur Resnick. BMI Work #494823.
- "Got to Give It Up." By Marvin Gaye. ASCAP Work ID: 370126211.
- "Gravy for My Mashed Potatoes." By David Appell and Kal Mann. ASCAP Work ID: 370065920.
- "Hammer Song" ("If I Had a Hammer"). By Lee Hays and Pete Seeger.
BMI Work #519188.
- "Handy Man." By Otis Blackwell, Jimmy Jones, and Charles Merenstein.
BMI Work #5720509.

- “The Happy Wanderer. [“*Der Fröhliche Wanderer*.”] By Friedrich Wilhelm Moeller, Antonia Florence Ridge, and Florenz Siegesmund. ASCAP Work ID: 360061292.
- “The Harder They Come, [the Harder They Fall].” By Jimmy Cliff. BMI Work #115830.
- “Hard to Handle.” By Alvertis Isbell, Allen Alvoid Jones Jr., and Otis Redding. BMI Work #526855.
- “Hear My Song.” By Jason Robert Brown. ASCAP Work ID: 380699665.
- “Heartache Tonight.” By Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Bob Seger, and J. D. Souther. BMI Work #1754170.
- “The Heat Is On.” By Harold Faltermeyer and Keith Forsey. ASCAP Work ID: 380264311.
- “Here Comes the Rain Again.” By Annie Lennox and David Stewart. ASCAP Work ID: 380256348.
- “Hey Jude.” By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. ASCAP Work ID: 380129566.
- “Hit Me with Your Best Shot.” By Edward Sydney Schwartz. ASCAP Work ID: 380218380.
- “Hit the Road, Jack.” By Percy Mayfield. BMI Work #571691.
- “Hot Blooded.” By Louis A. (Andrew) Grammatico and Michael Leslie Jones. ASCAP Work ID: 380199428.
- “How Long.” By J. D. Souther. ASCAP Work ID: 380147279.
- “How Will I Know if She Really Loves Me?” By George Robert Merrill, Shannon Rubicam, and N. W. Walden. BMI Work #595240.
- “Hurts So Good.” By George Michael Green and John Mellencamp. ASCAP Work ID: 380233738.
- “Hush, Little Baby.” [“Mockingbird” lullaby.] Traditional.
- “I Am a Fine Musician.” [“Ich bin ein Musikante.”] Traditional, based on a German folk song. BMI Work #13902045.⁵
- “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction.” By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #608621.
- “If I Could Turn Back Time.” By Diane Warren. ASCAP Work ID: 390467011.
- “If I Were a Bell.” By Frank Loesser. ASCAP Work ID: 390095842.
- “If Loving You Is Wrong.” By Homer Banks, Carl Mitchell Hampton, and Raymond Earl Jackson. BMI Work #705238.
- “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’.” By George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, and DuBose Heyward. ASCAP Work ID: 390020583.

- "I Got Rhythm." By George and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP Work ID: 390020627.
- "I Got You Babe." By Sonny Bono. BMI Work #625872.
- "I Kissed a Girl." By Catherine Roseanne Dennis, Lukasz Gottwald, Katy Perry, and Martin Karl Sandburg. ASCAP Work ID: 393213431.
- "I Know a Place." By Anthony Peter Hatch. BMI Work #631762.
- "I Love You Just the Way You Are." By Billy Joel. ASCAP Work ID: 400073952.
- "I'm a Woman." By Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. BMI Work #4175708.
- "I'm Gonna Live till I Die." By Al Hoffman, Walter Kent, and Manny Kurtz. ASCAP Work ID: 390050514.
- "I'm the Only One." By Melissa Etheridge. ASCAP Work ID: 390523503.
- "I Never Had It So Good." By Roger Nichols and Paul Williams. ASCAP Work ID: 390251637.
- "In the Midnight Hour." By Stephen Lee Cropper and Wilson Pickett Jr. BMI Work #720739.
- "In the Mood." By Joseph Garland and Andy Razaf. ASCAP Work ID: 390128940.
- "I Shall Be Released." By Bob Dylan. SESAC Work Number: 515006.
- "It Don't Mean a Thing." Edward Kennedy [Duke] Ellington and Irving Mills. ASCAP Work ID: 390148428.
- "Isn't It Romantic?" By Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. ASCAP Work ID: 390146671.
- "I've Had the Time of My Life." By John DeNicola, Donald Markowitz, and Franke Previte. ASCAP Work ID: 500394176.
- "I Will Follow Him." ["Chariot."] By Paul Julien André Mauriat, Jacques Plante, and Franck Marius Louis Pourcel. ASCAP Work ID: 330425866.
- "Jingle Bells." By James Lord Pierpont (1822–93).
- "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." Spiritual.
- "Jumping Jack Flash." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #780468.
- "Just the Two of Us." By Ralph MacDonald, William Salter, and William Harrison Withers. ASCAP Work ID: 400081381.
- "K-K-K-Katy." By Geoffrey O'Hara (1918).
- "Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree." By Marion Sinclair. ASCAP ID: 410175529, or, as "Kookaburra Song," ASCAP ID: 410233466.⁶
- "La Carte du Tendre." By Georges Moustaki.⁷

“Lay Lady Lay.” By Bob Dylan. SESAC Work Number: 514963.
 “Leader of the Pack.” By Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, and George Morton.
 BMI Work #843252.
 “Let Me Entertain You.” By Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne. ASCAP
 Work ID: 420022317.
 “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off.” By George and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP
 Work ID: 42003061.
 “Let’s Stay Together.” By Al Green, Al Jackson Jr., and Willie Mitchell. BMI
 Work #859990.
 “Let the Good Times Roll.” By Shirley M. Goodman and Leonard Lee.
 ASCAP Work ID: 420028811.
 “Light My Fire.” By John Paul Densmore, Robert A. Krieger, Raymond D.
 Manzarek, and Jim Morrison. ASCAP Work ID: 420138596.
 “Lithium.” By Kurt Cobain. BMI Work #876656.
 “Little Green Apples.” By Bobby Russell. ASCAP Work ID: 420143580.
 “Long and Winding Road.” By John Lennon and Paul McCartney. BMI
 Work #896236.
 “Look at Me, I’m Sandra Dee.” By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP
 Work ID: 420168607.
 “Love and Marriage.” By Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen. ASCAP
 Work ID: 420081361.
 “Love Is a Battlefield.” By Mike Chapman, Randall Hargove, and Holly
 Knight. ASCAP Work ID: 882360621.
 “Love Is a Rose.” By Neil Young. ASCAP Work ID: 420193348.
 “Love Me Tender.” By Vera Matson and Elvis Presley. BMI Work #922784.
 “Lover’s Cross.” By Jim Croce. ASCAP Work ID: 420179604.
 “Lovesick Blues.” By Cliff Friend and Irving Mills. ASCAP Work
 ID: 420097327.
 “Love Will Keep Us Together.” By Howard Greenfield and Neil Sedaka.
 BMI Work #928522.
 “Mad Love.” By Mark Goldenberg. BMI Work #940762.
 “Maggie May.” [“Wake Up, Maggie!”] By M. Quittentom and Roderick
 David Stewart. ASCAP Work ID: 430205477.
 “Magic to Do.” By Stephen Lawrence Schwartz. ASCAP ID: 886449522.
 “Mad Love.” By Mark Goldenberg. BMI Work #940762.
 “Mama Said.” By Willie Denson and Luther Dixon. BMI Work #269863.
 “Man of Constant Sorrow.” Traditional.
 “Martyr [for Love].” By Martin Lee Gore. BMI Work #7760075.

- “Master of the House.” By Alain Boublil, Herbert Kretzmer, Jean-Marc Natel, and Claude-Michel Schönberg. ASCAP Work ID: 430378497.
- “Material Girl.” By Billy Boyo, Madonna, and Byron Whiteley. ASCAP Work ID: 881172048.
- “Me and My Shadow.” By Dave Dreyer, Al Jolson, and Billy Rose. ASCAP Work ID: 430041671.
- “Funiculi, Funiculà.” By Luigi Denza and Peppino Turco (in Neapolitan, 1880). English lyrics by Harry L. Alford and Graham T. Overgard [with a better known English version by Edward Oxenford]. ASCAP Work ID: 60014106.⁸
- “Money Makes the World Go Round.” By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #2592542.
- “Mustang Sally.” By Bonny Rice. BMI Work #1026286.
- “My Country ’Tis of Thee.” By Samuel Francis Smith (1831).
- “My Man.” “Mon Homme” [“My Man”]. By Jacques Mardochée Charles, Albert Lucien Willemetz, and Maurice Yvain. ASCAP Work ID: 432736195.
- “My Melancholy Baby.” By Ernie Burnett and Robert Thygerson. ASCAP Work ID: 130065393.
- “[The Night Time Is the] Right Time.” By Ozzie Cadena, Lew Herman, and Nappy Brown. BMI Work #6242249.
- “99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall.” Anonymous.
- “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” Traditional spiritual.
- “None of Your Business.” By Herby Azor. ASCAP Work ID: 440216179.
- “Non, je ne regrette rien.” By Charles Dumont and Michel Vaucaire. ASCAP Work ID: 440048833.
- “No Salt on Her Tail.” By John Phillips. ASCAP Work ID: 440063352.
- “O Come, All Ye Faithful. [“*Adeste fidelis*.”] Traditional (ca. 1600s or 1700s).
- “The Old Gray Mare.” Traditional.
- “Once in a Lifetime.” [“Letting the Days Go By.”] By David Byrne, Brian Peter George Eno, Christopher Frantz, Jerry, Harrison, Martina Weymouth. BMI Work #1117241.
- “O No, John.” [“No, John, No!”] Traditional folk song.
- “Only the Good Die Young.” By Bill Joel. ASCAP Work ID: 450115269.
- “The Party’s Over.” By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne. ASCAP Work ID: 460012557.
- “Play the Game.” By Freddie Mercury. BMI Work #1179701.

“Poor, Poor Pitiful Me.” By Warren Zevon. BMI Work #1189347.
 “Price Tag.” By Jessica Cornish, Lukasz Gottwald, and Claude Kelly.
 ASCAP Work ID: 82430468.
 “Raspberry Beret.” By Prince. ASCAP Work ID: 80187626.
 “Respect.” By Otis Redding. BMI Work #1244564.
 “Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross.” Traditional.
 “Ride Like the Wind.” By Christopher Cross. ASCAP Work ID:
 480144485.
 “Riders on the Storm.” By John Paul Densmore, Robert A. Krieger,
 Raymond D. Manzarek, and Jim Morrison. ASCAP Work
 ID: 480092095.
 “Rock-a-bye Baby.” Traditional.
 “Rockin’ Robin.” By Michael McGinnis and Jimmy Thomas [Leon René].
 ASCAP Work ID: 482484079.
 “Rock Island.” By Meredith Willson. MPL Music Communications (no
 Work ID).
 “Run for the Roses.” By Daniel Fogelberg. ASCAP Work ID: 480149122.
 “[The] Sadder but Wiser Girl.” By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID:
 490002029.
 “76 Trombones!” By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 490040443.
 “The Shady Dame from Seville.” By Leslie Bricusse and Henry Mancini.
 ASCAP Work ID: 490483028.
 “Shake a Tail Feather.” By Otha Hayes, Verlie Rice, and Zephire Williams.
 BMI Work #1318017.
 “Shake, Baby, Shake.” By William Jack Dupree. BMI Work #1318065.
 “Shake Your Booty.” By Harry Wayne Casey and Rick Finch. BMI Work
 #1318490.
 “Shambala.” By Daniel Moore. BMI Work #1319243.
 “She’s Come Undone.” By Randy Bachmann. BMI Work #1572184.
 “Show Me.” By Joseph Arrington Jr. [Joe Tex]. BMI Work #1334574.
 “Silver Bells.” By Raymond Evans and Jay Livingston. ASCAP Work
 ID: 490062170.
 “Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves.” By Ann Lennox and David Allan
 Stewart. ASCAP Work ID: 790710124.
 “Sixteen Tons.” By Merle Travis. BMI Work #1351682.
 “Smalltown.” [“Small Town.”] By John Mellencamp. ASCAP Work
 ID: 490564922.

- "So Long, Farewell." By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.
ASCAP Work ID: 490089142.
- "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You [Dusty Old Dust]." By Woody Guthrie. BMI Work #1364950.
- "Some Like It Hot." By Robert Palmer, Andrew Taylor, and John Taylor.
ASCAP Work ID: 490555076.
- "Someone's Watching over Me." ["Raise Your Voice."] By Kara DioGuardi and John Shanks. ASCAP Work ID: 492236836.
- "Spinning Wheel." By Thomas David Clayton. BMI Work #1396227.
- "Strike Up the Band." By George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin. ASCAP Work ID: 490151654.
- "Stumbling." By Z[ez] Confrey. ASCAP Work ID: 882062133.
- "Stupid Girl." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #1423058.
- "Sugar, Sugar." By Jeff Barry and Andy Kim. BMI Work #1426093.
- "Summer Nights." By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP Work ID: 490299095.
- "Sweet Gypsy Rose." By Irwin Levine and Russell Brown. BMI Work #1294630.
- "Sweet Nothin's." By Ronnie Self. BMI Work #1440054.
- "Sweet Surrender." By John Denver. ASCAP Work ID: 490326779.
- "Sympathy for the Devil." By Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. BMI Work #144456.
- "A Taste of Honey." By Ric Marlow and Robert Scott. ASCAP Work ID: 500013836.
- "That'll Be the Day." By Jerry Allison, Buddy Holly, and Norman Petty.
BMI Work #1478417.
- "They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha Ha." By Jerry Samuels. ASCAP Work ID: 500221503.
- "This Land Is Your Land." By Woody Guthrie. BMI Work #1502028.
- "This Old Man." Traditional Counting Song / Nursery Rhyme.
- "Those Were the Days." By Eugene Raskin. ASCAP Work ID: 500195793.
- "Till There Was You." By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 500080424.
- "Time of the Season." By Rod Argent. BMI Work #1516893.
- "A Tisket, a Tasket." Traditional.
- "Treat Her Right." By Roy Head and Gene Kurtz. BMI Work #1542510.
- "Turn, Turn, Turn." By Pete Seeger. BMI Work #1521867.

“Twist.” By Hank Ballard. BMI Work #1561070.
 “Une Jolie Fleur [dans une Peau de Vache].” By Georges Brassens. ASCAP
 Work ID: 510535754.
 “The Vatican Rag.” By Tom Lehrer. ASCAP Work ID: 520035829.
 “La Vie en rose.” By Mack David, Edith Gassion [Edith Piaf], and Luis
 Guiglielmi. ASCAP Work ID: 520012862.
 “Wait for Me.” By Anthony, Ivan, Jared, and Matthew Followil [Kings of
 Leon]. BMI Work #16429253.
 “Walk This Way.” By Joseph Perry and Steven Tyler. BMI Work #1599866.
 “We Go Together.” By Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs. ASCAP Work
 ID: 530175918.
 “We’re Off to See the Wizard.” By Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg.
 ASCAP Work ID: 530031555.
 “What’d I Say.” By Ray Charles. BMI Work #1631628.
 “Whatever Lola Wants.” By Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. ASCAP Work
 ID: 530045862.
 “What I Did for Love.” By Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Lawrence
 Kleban. ASCAP Work ID: 530197994.
 “What’ll I Do?” By Irving Berlin. ASCAP Work ID: 2852023.
 “What’s New, Pussycat?” By Burt F. Bacharach and Hal David. ASCAP
 Work ID: 530135809.
 “When the Saints Come Marching In.” Traditional.
 “Where You Lead.” By Carole King and Toni Kathrin Stern. ASCAP Work
 ID: 530170824.
 “I Whistle a Happy Tune.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.
 ASCAP Work ID: 390083480.
 “Who’s Sorry Now?” By Burt Kalmar, Harry Ruby, and Ted Snyder.
 ASCAP Work ID: 530081448.
 “Why Can’t You Behave?” By Cole Porter. ASCAP Work ID: 530082769.
 “Wilkommen.” By Fred Ebb and John Kander. BMI Work #1674736.
 “Witchy Woman.” By Don Henley and Bernie Leadon. ASCAP Work
 ID: 530175669.
 “Ya Got Trouble.” By Meredith Willson. ASCAP Work ID: 550000489.
 “You Give Love a Bad Name.” By John F. Bongiovi [Jon Bon Jovi],
 Desmond Child, and Richard F. Sambora. ASCAP Work
 ID: 550147303.
 “You Had a Do Wacka Do.” By Roger Miller. BMI Work #1719799.

“You Light Up My Life.” By Joe Brooks. ASCAP Work ID: 550087093.
“You’ll Never Know.” By Mack Gordon and Harry Warren. ASCAP Work
ID: 888329629.
“You’ll Never Walk Alone.” By Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein
II. ASCAP Work ID: 550036469.
“You’re Lookin’ at Country.” By Loretta Lynn. BMI Work #1729131.

Notes

Introduction

1. The copyright symbol (©) will appear throughout when popular songs are invoked within the plays and to which copyright almost always attaches today. Although, in the kind of example I just used, copyright does not apply, I flag such moments nonetheless, precisely to illustrate my point about music entering the language. See “Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials.”

2. This expansive definition of “the Middle Ages,” which typically begins as early as the year 500, will apply throughout this book.

3. From many interesting studies of the urban spaces of medieval theater, excellent initiations may be found in Parsons and Jongenelen, *Comic Drama*, 1–20; Hanawalt and Ryerson, *City and Spectacle*; and Johnston and Hüskén, *Civic Ritual*.

4. Incidentally, this is the self-same domestic situation of such a farce as *La Farce nouvelle très bonne et fort joyeuse du Marié qui ne peut fournir à l’appointement de sa femme*, also known as *Le Nouveau Marié* (RBM, #2). My translation, intended for a future volume, is entitled *Not Gettin’ Any*.

5. Naturally, Hartman’s position is nuanced: “While it is true that the sons and daughters of titled and well-to-do families long married younger, had family-arranged marriages, and might even move in with the groom’s parents, the vast majority of youth behaved otherwise.” When young people married, they “usually did so as agricultural servants or apprentices residing in their employers’ households. At marriage, these couples typically pooled their resources and created simple or nuclear households of their own, which meant that most residences in northwestern Europe housed just one married couple” (6).

6. Although unfortunately restrained to the limited period of 1576–1620, Donald Perret’s work in *Old Comedy*, paraphrased above, gives an excellent account of this.

7. For more on farce’s politically incorrect humor, see my “Comically Incorrect.”

8. For the history of rhetoric, start with Murphy, *Synoptic History*; and Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*. After Howard Harvey’s groundbreaking *Theatre of the Basoche* (1941), most of the scholarship has been conducted in the French language by a coterie of European scholars. For the social standing and material lives of the Basochiens, see, e.g., Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, *Les Clercs*, chap. 3. English-language sources include *ROMD*, chap. 3;

and Beam, *Laughing Matters*, e.g., 58–76. The term “income inequality” is not as anachronistic as it might seem: see esp. Hartman’s discussion of John Hajnal’s fascinating “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective”: if people are marrying later, then this represents “a period during which saving would be easy. These savings (e.g., by means of the accumulation of household goods in preparation of marriage) might add substantially to the demand for goods other than the food etc. required for immediate survival.” In other words, this phenomenon might “help to explain how the ground-work was laid for the uniquely European ‘take-off’ into modern economic growth” (Hajnal, 132; cited by Hartman, 23).

9. For more on the legal and fictional proceedings litigated by the Basochiens, see Harvey, *Theatre of the Basoche*; and, for the primary sources, see *FF*, 4–13; and *ROMD*, 151–52.

10. I refer to Paster’s elegant *Body Embarrassed*, esp. chaps. 1 and 3.

11. Aristotle, *De poetica*, ed. Harles; see also *MTOC*, 1–5.

12. For the original French, see Harvey, *Theatre of the Basoche*, 22; the translation is mine. In my “Rhetoric and Comedy,” I analyze this fascinating amalgam of corporeal signs, rhetorical theory, and forensic practice.

13. Helpful introductions to this vast subject include Frazer, *Scapegoat*; and Girard, *Scapegoat*; and, for the medieval theater, Koopmans, *Le Théâtre des exclus*.

14. Obviously, it was not permissible to stage live medieval “pornography” as we understand today’s practice of depicting graphic sex acts; so I tend to employ the term “protopornography.” Thanking Karma Lochrie for our interesting conversation about this, I reserve for a future volume a more complete discussion of the graphic medieval physicality that might indeed have been stimulated by graphic Middle French.

15. In *MTOC*, 53–57, I read a number of religious dramas in the context of Elaine Scarry’s *Body in Pain* and René Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred*.

16. Drawing on Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, Symes notes that the manuscript takes its name from one of its eighteenth-century owners, Henri-Charles de Coislin: it is now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (MS Coislinianus 120 [C], fols. 248v–249v). But there were more copies, she says, proving that “knowledge of *Poetics* II circulated in other forms (textual, oral, practical) which have yet to be discovered” (“Media and Memory”).

17. *Tractatus Coislinianus*, cited in her own translation by Symes, “Media and Memory”; cf. Symes, “Ancient Drama,” 115.

18. This one-sentence treatment of comedy appears in Isidore, *Etymologies*, ed. Lindsay, 2: bk. 18, chap. 46, my translation. For Barney et al., “comic writers are those who would recount in word and gesture the *deeds of common people*” (369; my emphasis). For more on Isidore’s decisive treatment of play in Book 18, see *ROMD*, 77–88. Of course, “privacy” itself is a contested term in the Middle Ages.

19. Projected for a future volume (working title, *Judgment Calls*) are my translations of *The Resurrection of Johnny Handout* (*Farce nouvelle et fort joyeuse de la Resurrection Jenin à Paulme*, *Recueil Cohen*, #50); and *The Resurrection of Johnny Silver-Tongue* (*Farce*

très bonne et fort joyeuse de la Resurrection Jenin Landore, RBM, #24). On the unreality of violence in farce, see, e.g., *FF*, 18–21; Bermel, *Farce: A History*, 23; and Bevis, *Comedy*, chap. 2.

20. I explore the paradox of faith and verisimilitude in “Performing Miracles,” 50–53.

21. My translation of that play, *Knocked Up* (*RLV*, #39), is projected for a future volume (working title, *Brothers and Sisters in Need*). The *Grey’s Anatomy* episode is “Something to Talk About,” season 2, episode 7.

22. As I argued in “Delivering Delivery,” the historical interplay among theology, rhetoric, antitheatricity, and antifeminism is a monumental topic whose rich complexity lies beyond the scope of this brief introduction. Important introductions include Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*; Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing*.

23. On the butter pots, see my discussion of an incident in Metz in 1511 (“Theater Makes History,” 1006). For the sooty blackface, I refer to the medieval Dutch play *Blow in the Box*.

24. Here, I paraphrase Aristotle’s theory that an impossible probability trumps an improbable truth: “A convincing impossibility is preferable to that which is unconvincing though possible” (*Poetics*, 1461b).

25. I allude here to the central debate about the literal vs. the symbolic meaning of Transubstantiation as taken up in a number of stimulating studies. For the interplay among Protestantism, Catholicism, and theater, see esp. Diehl, *Staging Reform*; Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*; Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*; and Kobialka, *This Is My Body*.

26. On the medievalism of reality TV, see also Weisl, “Confession, Contrition”; and Ashton and Kline, *Medieval Afterlives*.

27. Alan Knight offered a more nuanced version of the idea in *Aspects of Genre* (51–52); but I know of no better introduction to the scope, history, and rhetoric of medieval satire than Ben Parsons’s stunningly erudite “Riotous Spray,” esp. 115–18.

28. Swart cites Douglas, “Social Role of Cognition,” 369.

29. For performativity and speech-act theory, I refer esp. to Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Lecture II; or his *Philosophical Papers*, 220–39.

30. *Epistres (familières)*, cited in translation in Tydeman, *MES*, 333.

31. *Morale Scolarium*, 234; cited and translated by Parsons in “Riotous Spray,” 115.

32. Orwell cited in Swart, “Terrible Laughter,” 888–99.

33. See, e.g., the case of Marguerite Vallée, who murdered her abusive husband in 1536 after enduring regular domestic violence, as analyzed by Natalie Zemon Davis in *Fiction in the Archives*, chap. 3; or the gang rape of Mrs. Coton discussed in my “Spectacle of the Scaffolding.”

34. Even though most official rulings elaborate on the good to come from mystery plays, they also grant license to stage farces. Space does not permit a review of the copious extant records, but a large sampling of documents appears in Lynette Muir’s “Section E: France” of *MES*, 277–344. See also Beam, *Laughing Matters*, chap. 1.

35. See below, e.g., my occasional reinterpretation of medieval farce as a bona fide parable of gay marriage (esp. in #7, *Holy Deadlock*). If you read French and can get your hands on a fascinating but highly inaccessible text, check out the queer, pornographic take on farce in “*La Farce de Pathelin*” et autres pièces homosexuelles. Unfortunately, only two libraries worldwide admit to owning a copy; but there is an extensive e-preview via Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=iHyINVxDW6EC> (accessed 20 March 2016).

36. At the time of this writing, the fraternity chapter SAE was expelled from the University of Oklahoma for, among other things, perpetuating venal, racial bias in the form of a cheery song and dance.

37. Believe it or not, it even anticipates some of the insights of medieval animal studies; see esp. McCracken and Steel, “Animal Turn”; and keep your eyes open for the various animals and animal idioms that pop up in #2, *The Shithouse*; #4, *For the Birds*; and #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*.

38. A good place to start, e.g., is Hopkins, *Concise Introduction*, 8–9.

39. Other signs of renewed scholarly attention: Noah Guynn’s *Many Faces of Farce* and the special issue of *postmedieval* (*Comic Medievalisms*) that Louise D’Arcens edited.

About This Translation

1. I discuss this strategy at greater length in “Performance, Translation, and the Betrayal of Sexism.”

2. Ibid.

3. Unfortunately, Melissa Mohr’s terrific *Holy Sh*t* is primarily limited to English-language cursing. Believe me: the English have nothing on the French.

4. Per my previous calculation (*FF*, 37): 12 in my 2011 collection + 11 farces previously available in English translation + Longtin and Moll’s new *Chicken Coop* + 11 new (excluding #3) in the present collection = 35.

5. Although the Bibliothèque Nationale has digitized the *Recueil La Vallière* (ms. 24341), the reproduction is of very poor quality: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90631556/f1.image.r=24341%20Valli%C3%A8re> (accessed 23 March 2016).

6. To date, I’ve not translated any farces from the *Recueil Trepperel* (thirty-five plays, of which five are farces); but at least one of those is projected for a future volume. For full details about each manuscript and printed source, see Tissier, *RF*, 1: 15–19; and Faivre, *Répertoire*, 9–28. On the cloak-and-dagger tale of Koopman’s rediscovery of the *Recueil Cohen*, see *FF*, 39–40. Ten of the twelve plays of *FF* were from the *Recueil Cohen*.

7. One exception is Jenny’s offer in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, to pay in gold (see #11, note 40).

8. Between 1360 and 1641, the coins minted as 1 *livre tournois* were called *francs*; these were eventually replaced by the *écus* in 1577, the primary gold coin in circulation in France.

9. The signature work in the field is Howard Mayer Brown's *Music in the French Secular Theater, 1400–1550*.

10. Michel Rousse identified many of the offerings in *Holy Deadlock* (TFFMA, 2: 219–27); so too did the musicologist Jacques Chailley for at least thirteen medieval songs of the *Recueil Cohen*, for which the music or lyrics have survived. See Chailley's book review of Cohen's edition of the *Recueil*, 66–68.

11. Illustrated dance manuals such as Thoinot Arbeau's sixteenth-century *Orchésographie* assist us in identifying some of the specific dances mentioned in, e.g., #9, *Wife Swap* and #10, *Husband Swap*.

12. Spoiler alert! Why are you reading this endnote now? Why not wait to see whether you can *hear* my solution on the pages of #2, *The Shithouse* and #4, *For the Birds*?

13. One such device, the *rondeau triolet*, is associated with, e.g., the comings and goings of a given character, moments of elevated tension, turning points in the action, or changes of scene (FF, 48). Occasionally, I reproduce the original Middle French in the notes with a more literal translation.

Play 1. *The Newlywed Game*

1. The number of the play is mistakenly listed in *RTC* as #80 (between #88 and #90).

2. On the literary value of the quodlibet, see my “Theater of Scholastic Erudition” and *ROMD*, 108–25.

3. To view the Miller bit, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eceSHKqwUPY> (accessed 15 March 2014).

4. Certainly we find ample such advice in the *Distaff Gospels* (below, note 13) and *The Good Wife's Guide* (*Le Ménagier de Paris*). Actually, it reminds me of the wonderful scene in the film *Ray* that depicts the genesis of “What'd I Say.”® When asked “Where can I get that song?” Ray's manager responds: “I'll tell Ray he should record it!”

5. Among the more fascinating farces (projected for a future compilation of mine) is *The Battle of the Books* (*Farce nouvelle de Digeste Vieille et Digeste Neufve où deux escoliers estudiant, lesquelz ne peuvent trouver moyen d'avoir argent, si n'est par coustume et loix* [RC, #43, 333–40]). Here, actual books take to the stage to debate their own relevance.

6. Scrolls are not uncommon in medieval French farce, as in the *Edict of Noée* (FF, 104), *The Washtub*, trans. Mandel, 147–49, or in Rutebeuf's *Le Miracle de Théophile* (MFP, 189–92). A new translation of the second is planned for my projected volume of legally themed farces, working title *Judgment Calls*.

7. See, e.g., Mandel's accessible English translation, *The Play of Robin and Marion*, in *FCMF*, 85–104.

8. A well-suited possibility might be “Why Can't You Behave?”® or “Treat Her Right.”®

9. *Conseil de bouche et d'escript* is a lawyerly expression referring to one who counsels orally and in writing (ATF, 1: 1).

10. This is the first appearance of the key line that will form the refrain: *Comment je pourray mon courage / bien gouverner en mariage* (1: 1).

11. He proposes a generous payment of four gold *écus* (1: 2). On my translations of currencies, see “About This Translation,” § “Money, Money, Money.”

12. Here is the first of many refrains, some of which vary slightly: *Dictes-moy, sire, que feray?* (1: 3).

13. [*T*]u trouveras par escript / Aussi L’Evangille le dit . . . (1: 4). In invoking the Gospels, Doc Phil might even be making a sly, comical allusion to the *Distaff Gospels*, a book of popular wisdom referenced more extensively in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*.

14. Metacommentary alert: here is *contrefaire* (1: 4).

15. Alternatively: “I want to screw. What’ll I do?”[©]

16. Such a complaint is made by the family of a son-in-law who has not yet consummated his marriage in the *Farce nouvelle très bonne et fort joyeuse du Marié qui ne peult fournir à l’appointement de sa femme*, #2 from the RBM. My translation, tentatively titled *Not Gettin’ Any*, is projected for *Judgment Calls*.

17. Maybe I’ve read too much farce but when I see the verb *complaire*, “to please or to be pleasing to,” I also see *con plaire*: “to be pleasing to the female bottom” (*con* = cunt). As for the “exact opposite,” what is this? A precursor to *Seinfeld*? I refer to “The Opposite” (aired 19 May 1994) in which George Costanza turns his life around by doing the opposite of what common sense would dictate.

18. Phil’s line *jà ne fait chose qui luy plaise* (1: 8) might have a double meaning: a husband can’t do anything to please his wife; or *she* never does anything to please *him*.

19. Wink wink, nudge nudge to anyone who remembers Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks in the Coffee Shop bit from the *2000 Year Old Man*. Meanwhile, *chevance* for “getting out of something” is aurally reminiscent of the horses (*cheval/chevaux*) of Phil’s previous speech.

20. Appropriate choices might include such as song as “Martyr [for Love].”[©]

Play 2. *The Shithouse*

1. To view the clip from *Dogma*, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEdOqYEwT8> (accessed 16 March 2014). Bayless treats and reproduces the Harington image in *Sin and Filth*, 4.

2. Titled *Le Poulier* or *Le Poulailler*, these two farces appear in the *RLV* as #25 (for six characters) and #47 (for four characters); both are discussed by Tissier in *RF*, 11: 188–98; and both are summarized by Faivre in *Répertoire*, #137 (351–53) and #138 (354–57). See also the translation by Longtin and Moll.

3. There is an easy-to-access English translation of Day 2, Tale 11 of the *Heptameron* at: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/navarre/heptameron/heptameron.html#N11A> (accessed 17 March 2016).

4. The valet in medieval French farce often has a cat in tow, as in some of the “John-Boy” plays projected for a later volume of mine, such as *Jeninot qui fit un roi de son chat*, #17 in the RBM, which I’ve tentatively titled *Cat’s Meow*, or, *A Cat May Look at a King*.

5. Wolfy expressions include *being thrown to the wolves*; *evil wolves ripping your throat out* (RFMSJ, 3: 27); *being strangled by a pack of famished wolves* (3: 36); and a popular expression about *God protecting the wolves' tails* (3: 19). The last of these, *Dieu garde la queue des loups*, might mean anything from “meticulously” (*queue leu-leu*) to “being careful” to “engaging in useless activities”; see also RF 1: 218–19n.

6. To wit, in the *Farce nouvelle des Chambrières qui vont à la messe de cinq heures pour avoir de l'eau bénite*, which appears as #50 in the RBM. My translation—as *Bro Job*, or, *Cum Hither*—is projected for a later volume. See also *At Cross Purposes* (FF, 241) for another prayerful *Asperges*.

7. For more on the motif of diabolical activities in the privy, see Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, chap. 1; and, for excrement in general—dare I say a veritable cottage industry—Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages*; Laporte, *History of Shit*; and Mohr, *Holy Sh*t*. *Pissed Off* is my title for another farce that rightly centers around urine specimens: the *Farce nouvelle très bonne et fort joyeuse d'un Amoureux*, #13 from the RBM, and planned for a future anthology.

8. Compare, e.g., to all the commotion at the door to the monastery in *Monk-ey Business* (FF, #9), sc. 4. See also Tissier for some superb dramaturgy plus a visual for the scenography (RF, 1: 192).

9. One such song is attributed to the thirteenth-century *trouvère* Etienne de Meaux, “Trop est mes maris jalos.” For a discussion of the full text in translation, see Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-songs*, 82–85.

10. Drawing upon Miri Rubin's *Gentile Tales* and Claudine Fabre-Vassas's *Singular Beast*, I analyze this phenomenon in connection with the *Mistère de la Sainte Hostie* in “Theater Makes History,” esp. 1009–10.

11. On the Enfants-sans-Souci, see Bouhaïk-Gironès, *Les Clercs de la Basoche*, 131–35; fascinatingly, this would render an entire society part of the theater-oriented urban legendry that I've documented in *Death by Drama*.

12. For the Monty Python bit, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV2ViNJFZC8> (accessed 31 October 2015).

13. After l. 3, at least an entire line seems to be missing because nothing rhymes with *J'ey bien raison de me plaindre* (3: 3); thus I have added a line that makes sense.

14. The disease she invokes is *la teigne*, a fungal infection of the scalp (3: 5).

15. A *bonet* might be any number of silly hats: a fool's cap or even a sleeping cap or *bonet de nuit* (3: 6).

16. Here it is: *lourdault* (3: 6).

17. See 3: 6 for *batue toulte nue* and more. As Guilhamet points out in his introduction to *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*, the essence of satire is for the “evildoer” to be “stripped and whipped” (8).

18. *Le mot vous cuyra* (3: 6) is a version of another common refrain: *la chanson vous cuyra*, as in *Confession Lessons* (FF, 114–15).

19. The opposition here is between *lourdault* and *friant* (3: 8), the latter often used for food, as in tasty morsels. For food and sexuality in medieval French comic literature, albeit technically in fabliau rather than farce, see Gordon, *Culinary Comedy*, 122–39

20. This time, Willy wants the pointy hat or *bonet poinctu* (3: 9) described above, § “Costumes and Props.”

21. The Middle French idiom is the equivalent of “not a single living soul” but, in this case, it involves a literal invocation of cats: *n’y viendra ni chat ni chien* (“no cat or dog will come in”) (3: 10).

22. While poetic, my translation is literal enough not to warrant a precise word-for-word version in English (as I supplied, on occasion, in *FF*). But see the original lyrics below.

Original Lyrics in Middle French (3: 10–11).

L'AMOUREULX entre

*Fy d'avoir qui n'a son plaisir
Fy d'or, fy d'argent, fy de richesse
Hors de mon coeur toult desplaisir
Fy d'avoir qui n'a son plaisir,
Toult passe temps je veulx choisir
Chassant de moy deuil & tristesse;
Fy d'avoir qui n'a son plaisir.
Fy d'or, fy d'argent, fy de richesse,
Y fault aler voir ma maistresse,
Car c'est mon plaisir & soulas
C'est celle qui de moy est mestresse
Faict evader.*

La FEMME

Viendra poinct, las!

23. The epic vocabulary of the battlefield is so striking here—*Deffendez-vous car assaillir / On vous vient par cruel effort* (3: 11)—that I’ve doubled it as Allcock prepares to storm the palace gates. Okay, tripled it.

24. In this case, the actual currency is 1 *écu*.

25. I agree with Tissier that this line rightly belongs to Kitty (*RF* 1: 211n).

26. Something like “I Got You Babe”® might work well.

27. Concerning the term “alas,” *hélas* in the original manuscript (307v), Tissier finds it misplaced in the mouth of the Lover (*RF* 1: 214–15n). So he attributes the unhappiness to Willy, who is obliged to serve what he prefers to eat. I disagree: I think Allcock is trying to fend off his horny mistress. But I’ve retained both meanings, as there is plenty of frustration to go around.

28. Here, we find the expression *péter bien de gresse* (3: 17), which denotes pudginess but which could also signal the kind of intestinal distress—farting—that results from fatty foods. See also Tissier, *RF* 1: 216n.

29. Tissier suggests that Willy is pouring the wine all along, preempting the Lover's desire to serve (*RF* 1: 217n). Meanwhile, as for that “not one drop spilled”—*Il est dedans & non sailly* (3: 17)—does this refer to the wine? Or, more farcically, to the possibility of spilled seed from coitus interruptus?

30. Alternatively, he might “announce” the master, as at a grand ball, by his full name . . . if only we knew it!

31. All Kitty says in the original is the polite *retrait*; but this mixture of polite and impolite shit will help Anglophone audiences get the gist.

32. The particularly economical *Bien voy qu'estes mary* (3: 22) seems destined for the ears of the Husband and Allcock alike. Literally, it is “I see very well that you are distressed (*mary*).” Remember, though, that Kitty has had a bit to drink. If she slurs her speech—and does so loudly—the line could also serve to alert her Lover that hubby is now within: “Yes, I see that it's *you*, my husband” (*qu'estes [mon] mary*).

33. He gives him *cinq soubalz* (3: 27). Five bucks for partridge sounds like a pretty good deal, but the point, of course, is that it didn't cost Willy *anything*; so, regardless of what the cheapskate master forks over, the valet comes out ahead.

34. Tissier points out that *sifler* can mean “to guzzle” (*RF* 1: 231); plus it's a near soundalike for *chifler*, a veritable synonym for engaging in all the fun and games of farce.

35. Alternatively, Tissier thinks that the Husband should sit down to eat, presenting Kitty with an opportunity to speak to her lover (*RF* 1: 232n).

36. His lament is so lyrical (3: 31) that it calls for another poetic set piece, again, in which I stay so close to the original verses in Middle French that, with the exception of one bracketed expression below, a more literal translation into English is not necessary.

Original Verses in Middle French

Voycy des mos fort rigoureuxlx.

Hélas! fault il c'un amoureuxlx

Mete la teste en sy ort lieu!

Et quesse sy, hélas! vray Dieu!

Las! je ne puy avoyr ma teste.

Voycy pour moy dure tempeste [This is, for me, a hard tempest],

Et oultre plus la puanteur

Hélas! me faict faillir le coeur.

J'ey le visage plein d'ordure.

37. Allcock yells *Brou ha ha!* (3: 33), which is just what the amorous Priest says in *Cooch E. Whippet* when he makes his appearance disguised as the Devil (*FF*, 245).

38. This line from *RLV* 312r is dropped in *LFMSJ* (3: 34) but restored by Tissier (*RF* 1: 236).

39. I couldn't resist this reference to the brilliant routine about Anne Elk from *Monty Python's Previous Record*.

40. Yelling at the audience to shut up is a common feature of Passion Plays (*DBD*, chap. 8).

41. Tissier attributes this line (3: 37) to Kitty (*RF* 1: 240), which would mean: "That's right, I'm sure." But I'm with Mabile (*CFSM*, 2: 184) that it is spoken by the Husband. Not only is that funnier: it appropriately reflects his coercive ways that shall evermore be far behind. Allegedly.

42. The joke here involves an allusion to Jehan de Lagny (3: 37), a notorious cuckold, sap, or idiot. See Tissier's lengthy footnote (*RF* 1: 240–41n).

43. For Tissier, when Allcock calls out to "gentlemen" (*Messieurs*), this is merely a formulaic address to the audience (*RF* 1: 24n). I think that it makes more sense to take his remarks literally as directed to the male spectators only.

Play 3, *Pots and Scams*, or, *The Farce of the Kettle-Maker*

1. Another fascinating play, the *Farce de la Femme qui fut desrobée à son mari en sa hotte et mise une pierre en son lieu*, #23 of the *Recueil Cohen* (179–85), is projected for inclusion in my next anthology.

2. *The Fountain of Youth*, from the Archives of Nièvre—i.e., the *Farce du Vieillard, de la Femme et du Peintre ou la Fontaine de Jouvence*—is planned for inclusion in a later volume of mine. See Faivre, *Répertoire*, #60, 168–69.

3. More animal husbandry follows in #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*. For an initiation to animal studies in medieval studies, see esp. "The Animal Turn," ed. McCracken and Steel.

4. Merceron discusses the Kettle-Maker in *Dictionnaire des Saints imaginaires*, 194–96. Giuseppe Di Stefano also catalogues the names of such ersatz saints in his marvelous "A Chaque Saint sa Chandelle," 130–31.

5. The straw beard, notes Fournier, is a comic device found in both Jean Bouchet and François Rabelais (*TFR*, 313n).

6. Metacommentary alert: *faindre* ("to fake" or "to pretend").

7. The term *tonné* (*ATF*, 2: 108) brilliantly conveys both "getting one's hide tanned" and being "surprised to the point of being dumbstruck."

8. Here, *deux patars* (2: 109) invokes a slang denomination for currency not mentioned in "About This Translation," one that refers vaguely to ancient coins.

9. Here, the fascinating term is *chinatoire* (2: 100), about which Tissier makes his best guess: i.e., that the statue is Buddha-like (*RF*, 3: 104n.)

10. He uses the term *rabobeliner* (2: 111), the same term that Hill employed earlier for repairing shoes (2: 106). He will also bring up "Saint Côme" again a few lines later.

11. *Damoysele de haudin* (2: 112): Tissier thinks that *Haudin* might be a place (*RF*, 3: 109n); but I am going with the (near) homonymy with *hautain*, “haughty.”

12. Fournier suggests that the weapon should rather be the spoon (*TFR*, 313n), as does Tissier, *RF*, 3: 111n. I think he should be hoisted with his own pot-ard. (Don’t groan. I owe that one to copyeditor extraordinaire Michael Gnat.)

13. The better to render the new rhyme scheme of the closing, I’ve doubled this section in prose and verse. Since two translations are already provided, I do not here offer a third, literal one.

Original Verses in Middle French (2: 114)

Le CHAUDRONNIER

*J’ay eu tous mes oz fouldroyez
Mes bonnes gens qui nous voyez,
Venez de la gageure boire,
Et annoncez et retenez
Que les femmes que vous sçavez
Ont gagné le pris.*

La FEMME

Dame, voire!

L’HOMME

*Allons jouer de la machouere
Et à l’hostel croquer la pye;
Venez y tous, je vous emprise
Et partirez [donc] sus et jus
De deux potz de vin qui seront beuz,
Et prenez en gré sus et jus.*

Play 4. *For the Birds*, or, *Conjugal Birdplay*

1. For those unfamiliar with the classic television show *The Honeymooners*, take a peek at this clip on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adQhWSfQsss>, or this mini-montage, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98qw86DsdZo> (both accessed 21 March 2014).

2. For some imagery and discussion of the brank, see my “Violence, Silence,” 220–22.

3. On this stunning moment at vv. 365–68 of *The Massacre of the Innocents* (*Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. Mills, 188; italics mine), see the groundbreaking analysis by Theresa Coletti in “‘Ther Be but Women.’”

4. *La Confession Riffart à quatre personnages, c’est assavoir Mehault, Riffart, Le Prestre, et Rogier*, #27 in the *Recueil Trepperel*, dates from the end of the fifteenth to the

beginning of the sixteenth century (per Droz and Lewicka, *RT*, 2: 56; xiii). It is summarized by Faivre in *Répertoire*, #35, 112–13, and is projected for a future anthology of mine.

5. See “Cuckold,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuckold> (accessed 21 March 2014); see also Fournier, *TFR*, 127n.

6. Such a refrain is found in the medieval song “Sumer Is Icumen In,” which appears in the famous manuscript, Harley 978; see <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitised-manuscripts/2012/06/sumer-is-icumen-in.html>; and, for a wonderful musical rendition, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMCA9nYnLWo> (both accessed 7 November 2014).

7. Since a verse translation is already more than musical enough, I make fewer suggestions about tuneful enhancements for our play. Of course, there is no dearth of songs that are for the birds, no dearth of cartoon birds to be projected on a giant screen—being cuckoo for Coca Puffs come to mind. But, given the “fine mess” the couple has gotten themselves into, one might begin with a slapstick, choreographed homage in mime, perhaps to the theme that accompanies Laurel and Hardy sketches, the “Dance of the Cuckoos.”[©] And there’s always “Rockin’ Robin.”[©]

8. Compare this with the Husband’s lament at the beginning of *The Edict of Noée* (*FF*, 92).

9. This line, *Il me fault aller besongner*, is omitted from Cohen’s edition but appears as v. 13 in Koopmans. See the longer passage below, note 10.

10. To give a feel for the poetry of the original, see below from the Koopmans edition (*RFlorence*, vv. 1–16). Many of the differences are not significant, having to do with the preference of nineteenth and twentieth-century editors for normalizing or modernizing orthography or adding diacritics for legibility. Some differences, however, are quite significant, and I draw attention to them here.

Original Verses in Middle French (*RFlorence*, 673)

RIFFLART

*Gens mariez ont assez paine
A bien considerez leur cas:
Par chascun jour de la sepmaine
Gens mariez ont assez peine.
L’ung tracasse, l’autre pourmaine
De nuit et de jour, vela le cas:
Gens mariez ont assez peine
A bien considerez leur cas
A besongner ne fauldray pas,
Car, ce ma femme survenoit,
Certainement elle me batroit.
Nuit et jour ne fait que hongner.
Il me fault aller besongner*

*Pour eviter si hault langaige.
Je vueil assouvir ceste cage:
Ce sera pour mectre une pie.*

11. In both the *RC* and the *RBM*—as well as in all the modern editions of the play—this line (*RC*, v. 36) is attributed to Riffart, with Finette not allowing him to finish his sentence (Viollet le Duc, *ATF*, 1: 23; Fournier, *TFR*, 126; Tissier, *RF*, 6: 39; Bowen, *Four Farces*, 4; and Koopmans, v. 38): *Macquereau! / Va hors, va, larron!* Another possibility is that Maggie says it (or says it first); thus one could add to her previous line: [How 'bout: "Get lost! You sleazy pimp!"]? That sounds just right!]

12. Depending on which birdies best do the farcical job, one might substitute the preferred feathered friend of the *Pathelin*: "If you're in charge, my goose is cooked!"

13. The phrase *mais ung estronc* (v. 93) is more like: "I'll put a turd in there in a minute!"

14. I'm with Bowen on finding the meaning of *demy ront* curious (126n). There is some ambiguity as to whether the feminine pronoun refers to the cage (*la cage*) or to the magpie (*la pie*); thus I've retained both.

15. As Tissier also noticed, this line (v. 115) was dropped by both Viollet-le-Duc and Fournier (*RF*, 6: 50n).

16. Here is the spot where Koopmans was able to identify that other haplography (above, "Production Notes"). Beginning with this speech by Riffart, I reproduce the relevant section below from his edition of the *Recueil de Florence*, vv. 117–21.

Original Verses in Middle French (RFlorence, 676–77)

RIFFLART *en frappant*

*La chair bien, si aurez des coups!
Tenés! Dictes: "une pie", ferés?*

FINETTE

Mais ung cocu!

RIFFLART

*Vous en aurés
Plus de cent coups, n'en doubtés mye
Ou une pie vous mommerés!* [below, note 17]

FINETTE

Mais ung cocu!

RIFFLART

Vous en aurés!

FINETTE

C'est pour neant, avant me tuerez!

RIFFLART

Dictes “une pie”, je vous prie.

FINETTE

*Non feray, par sainte Marie,
Mais ung cocu!*

RIFFLART

*Vous en aurez
Plus de cent coups, n'en doutez mie!
Cuidés-vous que soit mocquerie?
Il fault que je vous fine a bon!*

17. *Plus de cent coups, n'en doutez mie / Ou une pie vous mommerés!* (RFlorence, vv. 120–21): this lost repetition, reproduced by Koopmans alone, is especially fascinating. Okay, so I made Connor's “one hundred” blows Truffaut's “four hundred”; but, otherwise, the verb *mommerés* bears a striking resemblance to extant Middle French terms for *mummery*. See, e.g., my discussion of *momerie* and *mahommerie* in *MTOC*, 125–27. Koopmans might well be right that we should understand the meaning of *mommerés* as *nommerez* (from the verb “to name”) (677n), which would yield something along the lines of Maggie being threatened with blows until she *names* the right bird. But, at the very least, the term would surely have been evocative of naming, mumming, and miming—and all in a farce in which *mum* is clearly not the word.

18. The line *Cuidés-vous que soit mocquerie* (RFlorence, v. 128) offers wonderful meta-commentary on the mockery of farce itself. The anachronistic gun mag was as close as I could get to capturing the wordplay of *finer/Finette* in *Il fault que je vous fine a bon* (v. 129), as in *finishing* off *Finette* (RC, vv. 125–26).

19. In contradistinction to #3, *Pots and Scams* or *The Edict of Noée* (FF, #2), and despite some later hints by Connor about anteing up, these salvos do not lead to a wager about keeping silent.

20. This is the moment of the haplography discussed above in the “Production Notes”: i.e., here begins a brief section present only in the RC, where the copyist jumped from *jamais ce propos ne lerray* (v. 147) to the next occurrence of the phrase at v. 154. Tissier noticed it too (RF, 6: 54n), suggesting its poetic participation in the repetitions of the lyric *triolet*.

21. Here is the second occurrence of *jamais ce propos ne lerray*, signaling the end of the section lost to the haplography.

22. Technically she has a *malle teste*—a hothead's hot head or a head full of steam and other “shit”—the very physiological condition that ails Lexie in #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*. Again, to give a better sense of the poetic flair and economy of the play, I reproduce, from this point forward, the final verses of the play as edited by Koopmans (RFlorence, vv. 178–203:

FINETTE

*Cela n'est pas nostre usaige
Et ne seroit point a mon propos.
Femmes n'ont jamais le bec clos
Et ce n'est pas de maintenant.
En ta gaige certainement
Y mettré ung joli cocu.
Or dy, le m'achetteras-tu
Ou se je l'iray acheter?*

RIFFLART

*J'ayme mieulx le vous apporter,
Car j'en trouveray mieux que vous.*

FINETTE

*A quoy, dea, congnoistrés-vous
Se il est male ou fumelle?*

RIFFLART

*Regarder luy fault soubz l'esselle
Finette, la le congnoist-on.*

FINETTE

*Entour Noël en la saison
Chantent soubz la cheminee,
C'est une chose esprouvee.*

RIFFLART

*Or allons, vous et moy, chercher
Se ung en pourrons trouver
Pour bouter dedens vostre cage.
Qui gouvernera le mesnage
Tandis que g'irons au marché?
Bonnes gens, vueillés prendre en gré;
Nous en allons par cy le pas.
Ung chascun selon son degré
Vueille prendre en gré nos esbatz.*

23. I see an interesting ambiguity, signaled above with emphasis in note 22, between “wager” and “cage,” i.e., *gaigé* at RC, v. 178; *RFlorence*, 678n.

Play 5. *The Jackass Conjecture, or, Animal Husbandry*

1. Bevington's dual-language edition of the *Adam in Medieval Drama* is a marvelous place to start. The phrase, *nen issir de sa discipline*, appears at 82, v. 36.

2. See Day 9, Story 9 of the *Decameron*, as discussed by both Faivre (*Répertoire*, 347) and Tissier (*RF*, 6: 72–75); and Rebhorn's translation, 738–43 (esp. 740–43). Faivre also compares it to another farce, *Le Gentilhomme et Naudet*, whereas, for Tissier, the comparison is to the *Grand Parangon des nouvelles nouvelles* by Nicolas de Troyes.

3. For Jeay and Garay, this phrase often appears as “true as the gospel” and the like. I may have seen one *Daily Show* too many, but this sort of thing reminds me of the Marcia Fudge press conference spoofed on 28 November 2012 as “Tyler Perry's House of Representatives”: <http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/41u23k/tyler-perry-s-house-of-representatives> (accessed 13 April 2014).

4. Meanwhile, nonlexicographers have gravitated online to “Jenny” and “Molly” as beautiful women. See <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=molly> and <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jenny> (both accessed 13 April 2014). Purists routinely object to the viability of the Urban Dictionary as a citable source; but the reality is that popular idioms in Middle French might also have been of questionable repute. And few things are more impure than macaronic language.

5. See the premier study by Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*. Macaronic language is often compromised in English translation, as I note in my review of Tydeman's *Medieval European Stage*.

6. I am especially grateful to have heard Peggy McCracken's work on “Text Networks and the Desire for Translation” in which, drawing on Daniel Selden's impressive “Text Networks” and Michelle Warren's “Translating English Literary History,” she proposed a theory of “neighborly” translation.

7. See *TFR*, 148n; and *RTC*, 218. On Saint Francis of Paola (sometimes spelled Paula, after the Calabrese, Pàula), who founded a “minimalist” religious order known as the Minims, see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06231a.htm> (accessed 14 April 2014).

8. The key sources for proverbs and popular wisdom in the French Middle Ages include Oudin, *Curiositez françoises*, where the *pont aux ânes* is glossed at 438–39; and Le Roux de Lincy, *Livre des Proverbes*, 1: 72. There is also an excellent French-language summary of the term at http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pont_aux_ânes (accessed 13 April 2014).

9. The Monty Python clip is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crIJvcWkVcs> (accessed 13 April 2014).

10. For donkeys, I knew a few idioms; but imagine my surprise at finding eighty-four when I accessed the philologically impure Urban Dictionary on 29 November 2012: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=donkey>.

11. This woodcut from the *Stultifera navis*, a Latin translation of *Das Narrenschiff* by Jakob Locher (1497), is attributed to the German Gnad-Her-Meister (although many

of the other illustrations are attributed to the great Albrecht Durer). It was published by Johann Bergmann in Basel in 1498. See <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll15/item/77>. All the woodcuts are available online courtesy of the University of Houston Library at <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll15> (accessed 11 May 2015).

12. For the French donkey proverbs, see: <http://raf-proverbes.blogspot.com/2008/11/proverbes-sur-les-anes.html> and <http://raf-proverbes.blogspot.com/2008/11/proverbes-sur-anesse.html> (both accessed 13 April 2014). There are more in Le Roux de Lincy, *Livre des Proverbes*, 1: 72.

13. I know of no better initiation to the symbology of menstruation in medieval literature than Peggy McCracken's *The Curse of Eve*, esp. chaps. 1 and 4 devoted to the very gender of blood.

14. To bean yourself with some of these meanings, see *RF*, 6: 98; *TFR*, 152n; and Di Stefano and Bidler, *Toutes les herbes*, 248.

15. I can't help it: this reminds me of the line, delivered at a nursing home, from the 1970 film, *Where's Poppa?*: "You want lunch, you shake your ass!"

16. Here, she switches to *tu* (*ATF*, 2: 36).

17. Table manners were laid out by none other than John of Garland in chaps. 9 and 16 of the *Morale scolarium* (in *Two Medieval Satires*, ed. and trans. Pactow, 159–60, 168–69).

18. *Tenir leurs barons en douceur* (2: 37). Fournier notes that the term *baron*, unusual for farce, is nonetheless consistent with the narrative technique of the *Distaff Gospels* (*TFR*, 149), which Johnno will cite shortly. See also Tissier, *RF*, 6: 83n.

19. *Ilz prennent le dyable à seigneur* (2: 37) has a witchy-woman® ring to it. The countless women who were prosecuted (and persecuted) as "witches" were said to have taken the Devil as their lord and master.

20. Fournier reminds us that *quoniam* (2: 38), a legalese equivalent for "whereas," was typically the first word of papal bulls. By the way, *Of Learned Ladies and Papal Bullshit*, projected for a future anthology, is the title of my translation of the *Farce nouvelle des femmes qui se font passer maistresses*, *RC*, #16, 113–22.

21. For a politicized update, one might add: "Besides, it's all been upheld by Congress. I'm a Tea-Partier myself: don't believe in no separation o' Church and State."

22. For the rapid-fire exchange that begins with this line (2: 38–41), I have preserved the original versification:

Original Verses in Middle French (2: 40–41)

LA FEMME

Je ne te crains.

LE MARY

Ne moy aussi

Non plus que un enfant de dix ans.

LA FEMME

*Se tu me veulx rien, me vecy:
Je ne te crains.*

LE MARY

*Ne moy aussi.
Si ne deust-on pas faire ainsi.*

LA FEMME

*Somme, pour tous les mesdisans
Je ne te crains.*

LE MARY

*Ne moy aussi.
Non plus qu'un enfant de dix ans.
Sainte sang bieu, quelz mots cuisans. . .*

23. Even Godefroy isn't certain of the meaning of the verb *filer* (at 2: 38). Tissier wisely proposes that it is analogous to *filer doux*, a medieval expression meaning to "submit with docility" (RF, 6: 87n). But, since the clear implication is that Jenny has no intention of submitting, I'm going with what *filer* means today: "gotta run." Moreover, the homonymy with spinning (also *filer*) is consistent with the very setting of the *Distaff Gospels*.

24. Believe it or not, the delectable *Seinfeld* tag line is not so far from the French idiom, *les carottes sont cuites*, literally, the "carrots are cooked" or "you're done for."

25. The folk remedy of shelled peas for pregnant women is allegedly found in the *Distaff Gospels* but, as Tissier notes (RF, 6: 89n), no such recommendation exists. (See, e.g., *Distaff Gospels*, 90–95.) So have some fun with the interpretation of that one. If *this* is how Jenny chooses to reveal her blessed tidings to her husband. . .

26. At 2: 40, this is the hapax legomenon, *tablative*; see also Tissier, RF, 6: 90n.

27. Here, it's technically that God *created* the sun (2: 41); but this is a good way to bring out the *Song of Roland* subtext.

28. If you dare: "It's Monsignor Domine Dago!" Compare this chance meeting of persons already acquainted with a similar encounter at the opening of *Monk-ey Business*, FF, 285–86.

29. He says Calabria, of course (2: 42), but Venice—and its Bridge of Sighs—will be more familiar to Anglophone audiences.

30. Although I find no hard evidence for this in the usual sources (Oudin, Le Roux de Lincy, Bidler, or Di Stefano), it seems clear to me that telling someone to go "soak the beans"—*faire les febures baynes*, which rhymes with *asgnes* (2: 44)—is more than a pun. It must surely have been an insult, probably a sexual one at that (above, § "Language").

31. *Ou des loups soyés-tu estranglée* (2: 45): I replace "being strangled by wolves," an idiom that we encountered in #2, *The Shithouse*, with one featuring an animal better suited to this play.

32. The Woodsman normally speaks to Molly using the *tu* form. But sometimes he uses *tu* with Johnno as well, creating some confusion as to which jackass he is addressing at any given moment. In this case, when he shouts *que la clavelée / Vous puis[t] serrer le musel* (2: 45), he is *probably* speaking to Molly because of the reference to the disease sheep pox (*clavelée*), also known as *ovinia* (*TFR*, 152n; *RF*, 6: 103n). But, since he uses *vous* this time, we're not sure—and neither is Johnno!

33. This line seems to be attributed to the Woodsman in the *Recueil du British Museum*, and the postmedieval editors have preserved that lesson (2: 45; *TFR*, 152; *RF*, v. 208). However, the change of speaker from “Le Boscheron” to “Le Mary” occurs at the very end of that very line: *Et si ne marchera ia pas. Le Mary* (*RBM*, iv). It is easy to imagine that “Le Mary” was meant to *precede* the line and that the copyist noticed too late that he had forgotten to indicate the change of speaker. Indeed, to my ear, it makes more sense as part of Johnno's running commentary. Johnno is far more eager to engage with the Woodsman than the Woodsman with him. Alternatively, the line might be doubled, with both characters speaking it.

34. If I were an arborist, I'd use “beech,” which—you'll see—I restore in Scene 4. But holly works better for the closing number. Again, you'll see. It might even facilitate staging a Christmas production that would slate this play alongside #4, *For the Birds*.

35. *Pour frotter les costez* (2: 46). Tissier resolves what he believes to be only an apparent ambiguity regarding the precise spots on her body where Jenny is beaten (*RF*, 6: 105n): that is, on both sides (*costez*) or at the ribs (*côtes*). Jenny will mention these body parts again shortly in her plea for mercy that Johnno spare her ribs (*espargnez mes costez*) (2: 49). To my mind, a beating is a beating is a beating.

36. In defining the verb *truper*, Godefroy cites the example from our play followed by a question mark. Fournier believes that it's a synonym for dancing (*tréper*) (*TFR*, 153n); and Tissier thinks that Johnno *kicks* Jenny (*RF*, 6: 106n). I think its vague similarity to *truffer*, one of the key verbs associated with putting on a farce, suggests that all those possibilities come together in the violent ballet soon to follow.

37. Incredibly, a risotto works perfectly: in Middle French, when Jenny says that she will fry the beans—*Je les vois frire* (2: 48)—she is referring to a simple dinner dish that is essentially a fried soup. The fourteenth-century *Good Wife's Guide*, e.g., features several recipes for beans at 277–78, 287–88.

38. The play comes to a close with another musicopoetic set piece, this time, resembling a rondeau. It is structured around eight tercets followed by an eight-verse envoi. The reference to ribs appears in the fourth line below.

Original Middle French of Final Scene (2: 48–49)

La FEMME

Et je feray voz volentez.

Lc MARY

Trottez, vieille, trottez, trottez,

Et servez quant il est besoing.

La FEMME

Helas! espargnez mes costez.

Le MARY

Trottez, vieille, trottez, trottez.

La FEMME

*Vos chausses seront descrotez,
Et si vous chaufferay le baing.*

Le MARY

*Trottez, vieille, trottez, trottez,
Et servez quant il est besoing.*

La FEMME

*Nobles dames qui avez soing,
Vos povez par cecy noter,
Le pont aux asgnes est tesmoing:
Besoin fait la vieille trotter.*

Le MARY

*Adieu, seigneurs, et près et loing,
Qu'il vous a pleu nous escouter.
Le pont aux asgnes est tesmoing:
Besoing fait la vieille trotter.*

Play 6. *Match, Point, Counterpoint*, or, *The Old Lover vs. the Young Lover*

1. See van der Werf and Bond, *Extant Troubadour Melodies*; Stevens, *Words and Music*; and esp. Treitler, "Oral, Written, and Literate Process," and Jonsson and Treitler, "Medieval Music" on the lack of terminological distinction between speaking and singing in the Middle Ages; see also "Appendix: Scholarly References to Copyrighted Materials"; and *FF*, 46–47.

2. For more early imagery, see Gillmeister's richly illustrated *Tennis: A Cultural History*.

3. I refer to the advent of impersonation in the liturgy, as noticed—and then dedramatized—by Karl Young in *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1: 80–81; see *ROMD*, 56–59.

4. A *huitain*, normally with a rhyme scheme of *ababbcbc* or *abbaacac*, comprises eight lines of either eight or ten poetic feet; a *douzain*, twelve lines of verse in pentameter (*RTC*, 257).

5. For Villon's masterpiece of contradictions and oxymorons, all very much comparable to those experienced by Wayne, see, e.g., the Galway Kinnell translation facing the original Middle French at <http://www.tau.ac.il/~tsurxx/Blois/Blois.html> (accessed 18 April 2014). Also included on that site a version set to music by Zvi Ladar: after all, Villon's poem is a "ballad."

6. For an excellent initiation to the subject, see esp. Marilynn Desmond, *Reading Dido*, chap. 1.

7. Drawing inspiration from Meredith Willson's preternaturally raplike "Rock Island"[®] from *The Music Man*, one might consider a modest proposal for what an opening parody of love might look like in the twenty-first century. To view the object of imitation of the parody, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZ9U4Cbb4wg> (accessed 27 April 2014). The content of "Rock Island"[®] is eerily similar to that of Wayne and Beau's debate; so it might be rendered as something like what I've fleshed out below. I hasten to reemphasize that my invocation of these materials is speculative, hypothetical, and in the interest of scholarly translation. Should a company wish to perform this parody, any and all necessary permissions must be obtained.

Consistent with my invocation above of homoerotic sensibilities (above, § "Sets and Staging"), I've proposed unisex names for the extra characters below.

[Charlie, a Second Old Lover]

[Jamie, a Third Old Lover]

[Dylan, a Second Young Lover]

[Leslie, a Middle-Aged Lover {or, what the heck!, "Meredith"}]

WAYNE

Cash for the merchandise.

Cash for the jewelry.

BEAU

Cash for the necklaces.

Cash for the hard goods.

WAYNE

Cash for the soft goods.

Cash for the fancy goods.

CHARLIE, a Second Old Lover

Cash for the treasures and the earrings and the bracelets.

JAMIE, a Third Old Lover

Cash for the fancy minks and sable stoles.

Cash for the champagne and beluga and the shad roe.

DYLAN, a Second Young Lover

Look, what do you talk?

What do you talk?

What do you talk?

What do you talk?

LESLIE, a Middle-Aged Lover

Why do they do it?

DYLAN

What do you talk?

BEAU

You can talk, you can talk, you can bicker

You can talk. You can bicker, bicker, bicker,

You can talk, you can talk.

You can talk, talk, talk, talk, bicker, bicker, bicker.

You can talk all you wanna, but it's different than it was.

WAYNE

No it ain't, no it ain't, but you gotta know the territory.

JAMIE

Sssshhh! Sssshhh! Sssshhh! Sssshhh!

It's the television, yes, the TV made the trouble.

Made the people wanna stay, stay at home, stay at home, never get out and go

Out the house, down the block, to a bar, to a diner that's 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 20
miles from the house!

LESLIE

Yes, sir, yes, sir!

JAMIE

Who's gonna patronize a little bitty two-by-four kinda bar anymore?

DYLAN

What do you talk?

What do you talk?

LESLIE

Why do they do it?

CHARLIE

No, it's not the TV at all, not at all.

Take a gander at the Net,

Why, there's Match.com

And there's eHarmony

OkCupid, Zoosk, Craigslist

You can shop till you drop on the Net.

DYLAN

What do you talk?

What do you talk?
What do you talk?
What do you talk?

LESLIE

Why do they do it?

BEAU

You can talk, you can bicker.
You can talk, you can bicker.
You can talk, talk, talk,
You can bicker, bicker, bicker.
You can talk all you wanna,
But it's different than it was.

WAYNE

No, it ain't. But, you gotta know the territory.

BEAU

Gone, gone, gone with the fancy minks and sable stoles.
Gone with the champagne and beluga and the shad roe.
Gone with wine and the sweets and the treats.

LESLIE

Ever meet a fellow by the name o' Jest?

CHARLIE

Jest?

DYLAN

Jest?

JAMIE

Jest?

WAYNE

Jest?

JAMIE

Jest?

LESLIE

Jest!

ALL

No!

CHARLIE

Never heard of any fellow called Jest.

LESLIE

Now he doesn't know the territory.

WAYNE

Doesn't know the territory?

CHARLIE

What's the fellow's line?

LESLIE

Never worries 'bout his line.

CHARLIE

Never worries 'bout his line?

LESLIE

Or a doggone thing. He's just a bang-up, beat-boxin', bling-wearin', great guns, every time a bull's-eye stud man. That's our Mister Big, Beau Jest, Beau Jest.

JAMIE

What's the fellow's line?

CHARLIE

What's his line?

WAYNE

He's a fake and he doesn't know the territory.

DYLAN

Look, what do ya talk?

What do ya talk?

What do ya talk?

What do ya talk?

LESLIE

He's a lover boy.

WAYNE

He's a what?

JAMIE

He's a what?

LESLIE

He's a lover boy. Got a line for 'em all, for the chicks in the town. Gotta crow, gotta cock, gotta cock-a-doodle-doo! Got the family jewels and the bling and the bling, and the big fur coat, big fur coat. And he tickles 'em and sweet talks 'em and gives 'em some love, with a hand on the ass, on the ass . . . runnin' up. . . .

JAMIE

Well, I don't know much about lines, but I do know you can't get the ladies with just talk alone, no sir. Maybe there's a squeeze, perhaps, and here and there a snuggle.

LESLIE

No, the fellow's got game, real game. I don't know how he does it, but he lives like a king and he dallies and he gathers and he plucks and he shines. And, when the man dances, certainly, boys, what else? The piper pays him! Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir, when the man dances, certainly boys, what else? The piper pays him! Yes sir, yes sir!

WAYNE

But he doesn't know the territory!

{Beau leaves the group and Wayne follows.}

8. I've retained the versification of the original (*RFMSJ*, 1: 5–6). However, since my translation is fairly close to the original, I do not provide a literal translation.

Original Middle French Opening

Le VIEL AMOUREULX commence en chantant

Vray Dieu! qu'amoureux ont de peine.

Par Dieu! j'aymase mieux la mort.

Sur moy n'y a ne nerf ne vaine

Qui ne se sente de remort.

Ainsy amours amoureux mort

Comme moy qui vaulx quasy mort

Mortellement mourant au monde

Pour avoir mené vye imunde

En prenant mortelle habitude

Et chassé chasteté tres munde

Avec honneur que l'homme esmunde

De sancté & de rectitude.

Pour plaisir j'ay sollicitude

Pour soulas desolation
Pour chagrin toute amaritude
Pour gloire malediction
Desplaisir pour mondanité.
Vouelà la retribution
D'amours & la méchanseté.
Fole amour cause iniquité
Honte reproche villenye.
Fole amour en captivité
Rend un chacun.

Le JEUNE AMOUREUX

Je le vous nye.

9. Alternatively: "It can't be wrong when it feels so right."⁶

10. *Ton mauvais blason te cuyra* (1: 7)—literally, "Your trash-talking will cook you"—is a common expression in farce; see *Confession Lessons* (FF, 421n); and *le mot vous cuyra* from #2, *The Shithouse* (RFMSJ, 3: 6).

11. Here begins the singing contest, in AAB-AAB meter (1: 7) as well as the list of what I interpret to be call-outs for some half dozen songs or, at a minimum, for their most popular verses or refrains. Since I've translated medieval songs into modern ones, I include a literal translation.

Original Middle French (1: 7–8)

Le JEUNE AMOUREUX

... pour qui el chante à voix plainière:
"Le jour que je voy mon amy..."

Le VIEL AMOUREUX

"J'en ay tout deuil & tout d'ennuy..."

Le JEUNE

"J'en ai tout plaisir & soulas..."

Le VIEL

"J'en cloches..."

Le JEUNE

"Et j'en suy resjouy
Et tout regaillardy..."

Le VIEL

"Et moy las..."

Literal Translation

The YOUNG LOVER

... for whom she sings, in full voice:
“The day that I see my friend . . .”

The OLD LOVER

“I’m in pain and suffering from it . . .”

The YOUNG LOVER

“I get only pleasure and release from it . . .”

The OLD LOVER

“From which I can but falter . . .”

The YOUNG LOVER

“From which I rejoice
All rejuvenated . . .”

The OLD LOVER

“And I, [alas!], so exhausted . . .”

12. Once again, to give a better poetic sense of this set piece, I reproduce the original with a literal translation.

Original Middle French of the Old Lover’s Song (1: 9–10)

Le VIEL

*“Las! de mon triste desplaisir
A vous, belle, je me complains
Vous m’y traictés mal mon désir
Sy tres avant que je m’en plains
Entre vos mains
Par mons par plains
Sans nul confort.
Dont sur ma foy
Comme je voy
(V)ous avez tort.
Maint homme en est croché & tort
D’esmé de bien & santé.”*

Literal Translation

The OLD LOVER

Alas, of my sad displeasure

To you, my beautiful lady, I complain:
 You mistreat me for my heart's desire
 So severely, that I come before you to lament.
 In your hands,
 From the mountains to the valleys,
 Without any comfort,
 Such that I tell you true:
 As I see it,
 You do [you are] wrong.
 Many a man has been wronged and turned inside out
 For loving right and well.

13. After this verse (1: 11), the meter changes from octosyllables to rapid-fire five-foot verses as the play crescendos toward its denouement. The better to convey the change of pace, I double the scene with a five-foot-verse version.

14. In the *Recueil La Vallière* (43v), as in all three editions of the play (*RFMSJ*, Fournier, Mabille), it is the Old Lover, Wayne who speaks these five lines: *Sy sont elegantes / Y sont arrogantes. / Et s'y sont plaisantes. / Mal sont profitables / Et trop variables* (1: 12). As published, his speech could be translated like so: "If they're elegant, they're also arrogant. And if they're nice, they're still a bad investment. And way too fickle." However, I believe that this is part of the ongoing rapid-fire exchange and that the Young Lover, Beau, interrupts sooner; so I've revised accordingly. To my mind, it makes more sense that the counterpoint would proceed with the Young Lover more quickly reprising his unwavering position. If, however, the original attribution makes more sense to you, it could be understood like so: by now, Beau's overall argument is so familiar to Wayne that he can finish the younger man's sentences. Again, this seems less likely in light of the fact that Wayne loses the debate: he is not so good at counterargument.

15. *Y sont amyables* (1: 12). Here begins a group of rapid-fire assertions in which "y" refers either to the male pronoun (which is frequently used for women in Middle French) or to the prepositional phrase "in love": "[They] are elegant [when] in love."

16. *Secourables* (1: 12) can be taken either way: "savable" and "able to save others."

17. I do not provide a literal translation below as I've already included prose and verse translations.

Original Middle French (1: 11–12)

Le VIEL

*Femmes nous sont bestes
 Et rompre les testes
 Par cris & tempestes.
 Et tousjours sont prestes
 Nous estre nuysantes.*

Le JEUNE

*Femmes sont segretes
En amour discretes
Doulces mygnonnetes.
Et tant bien parlantes.
Y sont avenantes
Cleres reluisantes
Trop plus suffisantes
Que nous bien disantes
Et plus agreables
Sy sont elegantes*

[Le VIEL]

Y sont arrogantes.

[Le JEUNE]

Et s'y sont plaisantes.

[Le VIEL]

*Mal sont profitables
Et trop variables.*

Le JEUNE

Y sont amyables.

Le VIEL

Y sont tous les diables.

Le JEUNE

Y sont secourables.

Le VIEL

*Mais desraisonnables
Et trop hault montés.*

18. For a different sensibility, one might consider “Glamorous.”¹⁸

19. For the finale, I venture the possibility of another parodic makeover. The message of a beloved bubblegum pop hit is strikingly similar in content, such that “Love Will Keep Us Together”¹⁹ by the Captain & Tennille might morph here into bona fide musical irony. That said, it would be just as consonant to wrap with a downer, or with two more songs expressing diametrically opposed viewpoints about love. Regardless of what is chosen, I hasten to reemphasize—yet again—that my invocation of these materials is speculative, hypothetical, and in the service of scholarly translation. Should a company wish to perform any of this music, all permissions must be obtained.

Le VIEL

*Par amour maincte compaignye
S'assemble à faire bonne chere.
Icy fais fin de ma matiere
Et me rent du tout en amours
Combien qu'amours m'a esté chere
J'en ai porté mile douleurs.
Je m'en voys passer mes couroux
En prenant congé de ce lieu
En vous disant à tous adieu.*

Play 7. *Holy Deadlock, or, The Pilgrimage of Marriage*

1. With the exception of direct quotes from the play in the critical apparatus, I've modernized the spelling of *pelerin* and its derivatives as *pèlerin*, *pèlerine*, *pèlerinage*.

2. The Rousse edition is paginated continuously both within the individual volumes and across all five volumes. As noted above ("About This Translation," § "Editions and Printed Sources"), when citing from that edition for this play, I opt for the latter.

3. *RTC*, 210–11; *RGS*, 3: 270–71; and *TFFMA*, 2: 216–17; see also Petit de Julleville, *Les Mystères*, 2: 159–60.

4. When mystery plays were produced in such a city as Mons in 1501, surveillance of strangers in town was sometimes a regulatory feature (see my "Of Protestantism, Performativity, and the Threat of Theater," 62–64). For noisy advertising that disrupted the liturgical offices, compare, e.g., with the famous story of the farceur Pontalais, who smashed his noisy drum over an angry priest's head (*DBD*, 108–10).

5. A similar disruption marked the 1539 arrest of the dastardly Hamel brothers in the midst of a theatrical performance in which they were playing devils (*DBD*, 92–94).

6. Rousse also posits a connection with the Rogation Days, during which citizens beat out the bounds of their communities upon young male bodies (*TFFMA*, 2: 227–29). See also *MTOC*, 99–103; and, on liturgical parody in general, see Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages*, chaps. 3 and 6.

7. French majors sometimes encounter the *Carte du Tendre* for the first time when reading Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. The Wikipedia entry is helpful for both the symbol and the canonical imagery: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map_of_Tendre (accessed 1 May 2014). For the Moustaki song, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoBn4Rxj978> (accessed 18 May 2016).

8. See, e.g., the lovely edition from the Bodleian Library: http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/159885/Mo-Father-William.pdf (accessed 1 May 2014).

9. See, e.g., Shapiro's translation of the *Fables*, 19–20.

10. For exemplary access to the subject, see *Robin and Marion*, trans. Mandel, *FCMF*, 85–104; Fletcher Collins, *The Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama*; and Howard Mayer Brown, *Music in the French Secular Theater*.

11. The notion of profanation puts farce into dialogue with some of the most stimulating contemporary literary and political theory, as in Giorgio Agamben's *Profanations*. Such theory plays a larger role in the theologically themed farces I intend for a future anthology.

12. On the days associated with specific prayers, see the always invaluable *Catholic Encyclopedia*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09291a.htm> (accessed 1 May 2014).

13. See note 49; and recall as well the fictitious saints discussed above in connection with Merceron's *Dictionnaire des Saints imaginaires* (#3, *Pots and Scams*, § "Language").

14. For the thread speech, see note 54. Although she tends to undervalue performance, Jeay offers one of the few critical assessments of our play in her unique study of medieval and early modern list-making, *Le Commerce des mots*, 489. See also Crane on reading dress in *Performance of Self*; as well as two masterworks on medieval fashion and textiles by E. Jane Burns: *Courtly Love Undressed*; and *Sea of Silk*.

15. For the lyrics of "Une Jolie Fleur"[®] in both French and English, see, e.g., <http://brassenswithenglish.blogspot.com/2008/02/une-jolie-fleur-by-georges-brassens.html> (accessed 1 May 2014).

16. For an extensive and reliable description of all these vestments, see the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15388a.htm> (accessed 1 May 2014).

17. This particular song, words and music by Moustaki, was covered on *Le Météque*, released in 1969 by Polydor Records. It does not appear to be registered; but some four dozen of Moustaki's other songs are registered with ASCAP, and another ten at BMI, under the artist's ID, IPI# 21673700.

18. Something like "I Will Follow Him"[®] or "Only the Good Die Young"[®] might capture the sensibilities fairly well, as would many other cleared musical choices.

19. There's a fabulous double entendre at *RFMSJ*, 1: 3 (*RGS*, vv. 7–8) related to *par chemin* (on the road) and *parchemin* (parchment, also evocative of completing a task), whence my insertion. The scroll could also be a map that Prudence consults briefly.

20. There is some confusion in the *RLV* (at fol. 87r) which is reprised in both *RFMSJ* (1: 6) and *RGS*, vv. 23–26. The "Old Pilgrimage" (our Biddy) is plainly the "First Pilgrimage" but, at this moment, the "Old Pilgrimage" *answers* the "First Pilgrimage." This is clearly a scribal error, which Rousse was the only one to correct (*TFFMA*, 2: 235). In all likelihood, the scribe simply lost track and meant to pen "Old Pilgrim" (*pelerin*, not *pelerine*), i.e., the male character who would logically be answering the question put to him. On the off chance that more of the text was lost, I've made room for two versions of the line by both characters.

21. For another piggyback ride, see *Birdbrain*, *FF*, 398.

22. In the original (*RFMSJ*, 1: 9; *RGS*, vv. 55–56), the double entendre is marvelous thanks to the homonymy of *le plus de débat* (the most discord) and *le plus d'esbats* (fun and games of the sexual variety).

23. *Qui voudroict saillir / Dehors des termes de raison* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 9–10; *RGS*, vv. 64–65): this is the language of formal logic, as also seen in such a play as Gréban's *Mystère de la Passion* (*ROMD*, 170–80).

24. Nobody seems quite sure about the *poynes de chiot* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 10; *RGS*, v. 78; *RGS*); but metaphors start to become increasingly agricultural: pears, raspberries, hazelnuts, roses, etc.

25. The expression *acheter sa pèlerine* is probably a reference to the dowry; but it might also hint that women whore themselves out on pilgrimage (*TFFMA*, 2: 240n).

26. Rousse interprets *autant sotes qu'apertés* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 11; *RGS*, v. 95), as “dressed up” (*TFFMA*, 2: 240n). Since *sotes* means foolish, I also see a subtext of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, which was staged as a genre of liturgical drama known as the *sponsus*. The precise monetary amount is 14 deniers (*RGS*, v. 96); by our farcical money math, that would mean a grand total of \$1.40 (above, “About this Translation,” § “Money, Money, Money”).

27. Farce is so self-conscious that I couldn't resist this translation of *crier a larme* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 12; *RGS*, v. 104): “to shed tears” (*larme*) resembles here the word “alarm,” to say nothing of the fact that, in modern French, to ask for only a small swig of liquor means asking for *une larme*. We say “two fingers” and chances are, so would the Old Pilgrim.

28. Alternatively, or additionally, to enhance the cabaret atmosphere: “Willkommen.”⁶⁰

29. The delightful term here, relatively rare, is a *brouilleur de parchemin* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 13; *RGS*, v. 120): a paper shuffler, or a scribbler on parchment.

30. At *RGS*, v. 147, the expression *sçavoir descroter cotes* (*RFMSJ*, 1: 15) might refer as easily to a knight's coat of mail as to getting under a woman's skirt.

31. The text refers to Oliver from the *Song of Roland* and to *Karesme prenant*, i.e., the three days before Ash Wednesday (*RFMSJ*, 1: 15; *RGS*, vv. 148–49), which were associated with carnival and Mardi Gras: all pretty Rabelaisian.

32. At *RGS*, vv. 151–52 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 15), there is wonderful triple entendre on *viellart* (old man), *viel art* (art of the past), and an old piece of lard (*viel lard*). Peas and beans will appear later with lardy ham (*du lard bon*) when the Old Pilgrim delivers his list of household items (*RGS*, v. 335; *RFMSJ*, 1: 25).

33. The reference at *RGS*, v. 156 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 15) is actually to Artus of Brittany from a fourteenth-century prose romance.

34. There might well be a pun at *RGS*, v. 159 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 15), related to the expression *chermer le trect*. It has to do with marksmanship, but it also seems to mean the medieval equivalent of doing shots. (Remember what I just said about alcohol in note 27?)

35. I've followed the main rhyme scheme more or less exactly; but, sometimes, the versification of a given stanza is more complex, with internal rhymes within the same verse at beats 4 and 8. In production, it would be desirable to compose original music or,

provided all permissions have been cleared, to substitute the refrains of popular songs (to which the Company might sing along). To give a sense of the original, I reproduce the Middle French below. When doing so for several important moments of this play, I do not provide a literal translation, as I follow the Middle French quite closely and/or provide dual versions in prose and verse.

Original Lyrics in Middle French (RFMSJ, 1: 17–22; RGS, vv. 180–284; TFFMA, 2: 246–52)

LA PREMIERE PELERINE

Un coeur qui d'amour est espoinct

Et peult mariage choisir

Je croy que de douleur n'a poinct

Y chantent *Puys qu'il est beau à mon plaisir.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

Vostre plaisir quant on a le loisir.

Mariage est mygnon & gent

On ne seroyt meilleur choisir

Y chantent *Quant la nuict est venue.*

LE JEUNE PELERIN

D'argent ne fault estre sergent.

Quant telle ioee est avenue

On prend un plaisir refulgent

Y chantent *Mais que on ne baillast poinct d'argent.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

La nuyct bien souvent par la rue

Tout mary on sent la froidure

Femme mule regibe & rue

Y chantent *Tant comme la nuyct dure.*

LA TROISIEME PELERINE

La nuyct nul mal on n'y endure.

C'est de plaisir une mont joyee.

On n'y seroyt trouver laidure

Y chantent *Quant on y prent soulas & joyee.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

Soulas & joyee mais rabat joyee

Menase le plaisir affollé.

Pensez-vous que croiere on vous dojee?

Y chantent *Nenin je ne suys pas sy folle.*

LA PREMIERE PELERINE

Sy folle! c'est simple parolle.

Ja a vostre dict n'entendray.

C'est vérité ou parolle

Y chantent *Ne me chault mon plaisir prendray.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

Vostre plaisir je respondray

Que noyse n'y vault rien sans debat

Autant vauldroit estre enfondré

Y chantent *Si j'estoys alé à l'esbat.*

LA TROISIEME PELERINE

A l'esbat! on y va sans sabbat

Mais un tas de mal-gratieux

Veulent tous servir au rabat

Y chantent *Dont y n'en seroyent valoir myeulx.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

Valloir myeulx & compaignon vieulx

L'ordre de menage est souldaine.

Je tiens pour fol et glorieulx

Y chantent *Celui qui la tient pour certainne.*

LA DEUXIEME PELERINE

Pour certainne & et au demainne

Et au jardin a bonne chosse

Florist ermerye marjolainne

Y chantent *Et aussy faict la passe-roze.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

La passe-roze & je prepoze

Qui soyt vray le dirai-ge? ita

Tant d'espines dont chanter n'osses.

Y chantent *Consommo l'année victa.*

LE JEUNE PELERIN

Onc bon coeur ne s'en despita

Au moins sy se veult faire valloir

Qui y entre son delict a

Y chantent *Comme un amoureux doit avoir.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

Avoir mariag[e] faict beau veoir

*Mais du menaig[e] n'a poinct d'enuye
Tousjours donner sans recevoir
Y chantent Je croys que j'en perdray la vye.*

LA PREMIERE PELERINE

*La vie en vient ou s'en desuye
Mon coeur en a joyeusseté
Car quant l'ordre est bien servye
Y chantent Y raverdist franc joyeusseté.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

*Joyeusseté tant est frete
Chagrin y est je vous promays.
Si j'en sors yver ou esté
Y chantent Jamais ne m'aviendra jamais.*

LE JEUNE PELERIN

*Jamais c'est un gracieulx mes
Que de ris a n'en doubte mye
Car g'y chanteray desormais
Y chantent Mais oublier ne la puyt mye.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

*Mye & sy ta femme te maistrye
Va-t-en, ja n'yra après toy
Et n'es pas peur qu'elle te dye
Y chantent Mon bel amy, atendés-moy.*

LA DEUXIEME PELERINE

*N'esce pas plaisir par ta foy
Que mariage on ne peult myeulx.
Telle leesse au monde je ne voy
Y chantent Pour en avoir son petit coeur joyeulx.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

*Joyeulx? Joyeulx? Voyere jusques aux cieulx
Hely! Hély! lassama bethany!
Pauvre grant bien et thesor gracieulx
Y chantent Et mon las coeur de tout plaisir bany!
Et je vous prie, n'en parlés plus huy
Vous ny elle, elle ne luy.
On n'y tient pas ce qu'on promect
Car de gran folye s'entremect
Qui se chastye par aultruy.*

LE JEUNE PELERIN

*Sans mariage on ne seroyt
Jamais tout bien se defferoyt
On n'auroyt amys ne parens.
Se sont termes bien aparens
Qui diroyt que non fol seroyt.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

*Les uns y vivent à souhaict.
C'est un mignotis un jouect.
Aultres y vont à la traverse.
Contre fortune la diverse
Un charestier rompt son fouet.*

LA PREMIERE PELERINE

*Escoustés que dire je veulx.
Pourquoy fistes vous donc des veulx
Pour enfin vous en repentir?
Tel fuict qui tient par les cheveulx.*

LE VIEL PELERIN

*S'aucun y faict plus qu'i ne peult
L'un y est esse l'autre s'y deult
Grisson y rue doulx est Moreau
Car entre cy et saint Marceau
Chascun n'a pas argent qui veult.*

TOUTES TROIS ENSEMBLE

Alons! alons! laissons lay dire.

36. Per the versification scheme, there should be a B-rhyme here (*gent* at *RGS*, v. 185), so I've corrected it. Alternatively, to produce a better translation of the flawed original, one might substitute: "It's only soft and sweet when you got time."

37. *Montjoyee* (*RGS*, v. 197; *RFMSJ*, 1: 17) is the hero's battle cry from the *Song of Roland*.

38. After this line, Middle French octosyllables morph into pentameter (*RGS*, vv. 254–60; *RFMSJ*, 1: 21); so I've moved from pentameter to twelve-foot alexandrines.

39. As Picot notes, *Hely, hely! Lassama bethany!* (*RGS*, v. 257; *RFMSJ*, 1: 21) parody the words of Christ on the cross (*RGS*, 3: 290n).

40. Rhyming octosyllabic couplets return here at *RGS*, v. 261 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 21) and continue until the procession is announced at *RGS*, v. 370 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 27). Inasmuch as the singing builds momentum, I've elected to stick with verse for now.

41. There is likely a line missing here (after *RGS*, v. 277; *RFMSJ*, 1: 22) that would have rhymed with *repentir*; so I've written one.

42. He asks them to bring the *pot au lait* (*RGS*, v. 292; *RFMSJ*, 1: 22) or bucket of milk. To channel La Fontaine again (trans. Shapiro, 169–70), this is the subject of many a fable or proverb, lest they cry over spilled milk (or seed?). Compare also with the famous self-contradictory advice from Pantagruel to Panurge in chap. 9 of Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* as to whether Panurge should marry, i.e., in contrapuntal form: "Don't marry at all" and "get married" (trans. Frame, 282–84).

43. If you like the sensibilities of the 1983 film *The Big Chill*, you could add: "Fear of herpes" or, for that matter, "Fear of AIDS."

44. In *RFMSJ* (1: 25), there is an extra "*Va! va!*" at the equivalent of *RGS*, v. 331.

45. In the text, it's "horse food" or *mengeure de chevaulx* (*RGS*, v. 348; *RFMSJ*, 1: 26). Compare with a similar line from Willy in #2, *The Shithouse* (*RF* 1: 213n).

46. Picot suggests—and I agree—that everyone joins in this new line, rife with religious meaning: *J'en suis certain et assuré* (*RGS*, v. 352; *RFMSJ*, 1: 26). See 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

47. Consistent with the line above, a company might consider "Strike Up the Band"® or "Love and Marriage."® To underscore the key transitions from the sacrilegious prayer to the procession to the threads-speech, I've offered both prose and poetic versions, as here for *RGS*, vv. 366–73 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 27): *Mais il se fault tourner vers Dieu / Et premyer qu'entrer au saint lieu / De mariage, il fault crier / Et à haulte voix Dieu prier / Et, pour prendre possession / Faire une grand procession / Sonnee à tresbelles sonnettes / Puy nous dirons noz chansonnettes.*

48. This is the stage direction discussed above, § "Sets and Staging." It appears in *RGS* after v. 383; and in *RFMSJ*, 1: 28).

49. Here begins the bilingual mess of a parodic prayer in Latin based on the Litany of the Saints (*RGS*, vv. 384–97; *RFMSJ*, 1: 28). In each of the fourteen verses (of irregular length, from ten to thirteen poetic feet), a fictional female saint is invoked. Some phrases are repeated; thus, I repeat them too. Their names in the Middle French are: *Bufecta*, *Sadineta* (from *sade*: *agréable*, *gracieux*), *Quaqueta*, *Fachossa*, *Grondina*, *Fumeta*, *Tempes-tata*, *Mignardosa*, *Gloriosa*, *Bouffecta* (and who might conjure comedy, as in opera buffa), *Jalousia*, *Chiabrena*, *Merencolia*: *omnes Sancti Frenastises*. And it does seem that Di Stefano missed these beauties in "A Chaque Saint." However, Jacques Merceron did not. In his brilliant *Dictionnaire des Saints imaginaires*, he offers glosses for each Saintie under the entry for Sainte Chiabrena, 358–60. They appear in Section 4, which is devoted to patronesses of gossip and babbling.

50. The stage direction after *RGS*, v. 400 (*RFMSJ*, 1: 28) reads *Ensemble*, meaning "together" or "in unison." It seems clear that the entire Company should sing each one of the seven-syllable "refrains" together: *Libera, nos Domine*, which always rhymes with the verse that precedes it. I've rounded out the refrain with the hortatory "*O*" in order

to create an octosyllabic verse, but dropping it would be closer to the original. My sense of the dramaturgy is that the stanzas alternate between the men and women, consistent with the meaning of their respective prayers. Philologically, the entire prayer takes full advantage of the dual meaning of *femme* as both “woman” and “wife,” even more so here than of *homme* as both “man” and “husband.”

Original Prayer in Middle French (RFMSJ, 1: 28–30 with emendations per Rousse)

De femme plainne de tempeste

Qui a une mauvaise teste

Et le cerveau contaminé

Ensemble: *libera nos domine.*

Des hommes qui vont au matin

Aulx tavernes parler latin

Et ont soubz la table uriné

Libera nos domine

De femme qui sa & là court

Et tient son mary de sy court

Comme un sot enjobeliné

Libera nos domine.

Des hommes qui par jeutx meschans

Vendent leurs robes aulx marchans

Pour estre au jeu trop obstiné

Libera nos domine.

De femme qui a les doys menus

Courtes mamelles & nes camus

Le faict bien sans lict encourtiné

Libera nos domine.

Des hommes qui, par un mistere

Trop souldain font leur femme tere

Et ont le cerveau obstiné

Libera nos domine.

Des femmes trenchant du gros bis

Qui despendent tant en abis

Que le mary est male diné

Libera nos domine.

D'un homme qui a droict chevauche

Et sa femme chevauche à gauche

*C'est tout à rebours cheminé,
Libera nos domine.*

*D'aller sans chandelle aulx retrais
Et s'asouer sus un estron frais,
C'est pour estre bien embrené
Libera nos domine.*

51. In the new prayer, the Latin *Te rogamus audi nos* always rhymes with the preceding verse, usually the third of four.

Original Prayer in Middle French (RFMSJ, 1: 30–31)

*Que nous ayons tous bon courage
Contre tourmens de mariage
Entre nous qui somes enclos
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Quant la femme tempeste & tence
Que le mary ayt patience
Et quelque petit de repos.
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Que ses bragueurs esperlucas
Coureurs fringans esperlucas
Qui font rage de caqueter
Pour bien du tout les arester
De bref puissent estre des nos
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Quant nos femmes nous tenceront
Tant, aux injures qu'ilz nous diront
Qu'il y ayt quelque peu de repos
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Qu'aultres ne leur batent les cus
Et facent leurs maris coqus
En faisant la beste à deulx dos
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Quant nous viendrons de quelque affaire
Que nos femmes se puissent taire
Et qu'ilz ayent toutes le bec clos.
Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Deffens nous de leur malle teste
 Mulerye tenson & tempeste
 De leur bec, gryz, ongles y ergos.
 Te rogamus audi nos.*

*Que les deulx nouveaulx espousés
 Se trouvent si bien disposés
 Qui'lz puissent en leur mariage
 Produyre bon et beau lygnage
 Et vivre ensemble longuement
 Puis en la fin ayent saulvement
 Avec Dieux en celeste enclos
 Te rogamus audi nos.*

52. This new request contains an extra couplet, so the prayerful ladies must be pissed off.

53. It could be very funny to expand this moment with a parody of another parody from *Saturday Night Live*: “Really? With Seth and Amy.” For an example, see <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/really-with-seth-and-amy-birth-control/n13402> (accessed 11 April 2016).

54. Here begins the strange and exceptionally technical list of threads.

Original Verses in Middle French (RFMSJ, 1: 31–32; my emphasis) in which I make a handful of very minor emendations per Rousse

*Fil d'estoupe, fil de Lyon,
 Fil d'Estampes, fil d'Avignon,
 Fil de Gibrey, fil de Paris,
 Fil noir, fil vert, aussy fil gris,
 Fil d'ozeille, aussy fil de lin,
 Fil de soeir, fil de matin
 Fil de Rouen, fil de Loviers,
 Fil fillé en d'aultres cartiers,
 Fil fillé en la bavache,
 Fil de fil, fillé d'estrivache,
 Fil de dedens, fil de dehors,
 Fil qui travaille tant le corps,
 Fil de jaulne et fil de fil pers,
 Fil double acoultré à l'envers,
 Fil blanc à ouvrir maintenant,
 Fil à mectre coulleurs devant
 Fil fillé d'une damoysselle,
 Sage, gratieuss' & belle,*

*Fil fillé de jeunes filletes
 Qui ont les mains ainsy doulcetes,
 Fil fillé pour finir partout:
 De tous ses filz je suys au boult.
 Or ne parlons plus de ces filz
 Mais resjouyssons noz espritz [visual pun of filz for “thread,” “son,” and perhaps
 “son of God” too, given the *espritz* that evokes the “Holy Spirit”]
 En prenant congé de ce lieu
 Unne chanson pour dire adieu.*

55. To view this encore from *Bill Maher . . . But I'm Not Wrong* (2010), see, e.g., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlpdC003mdM> (accessed 19 May 2016). I can assure you that the relentless mockery of ecclesiastical practice in our play was equally, if not *more*, controversial in its day. Indeed, this issue informs my principal interpretational strategy for the dozen “holy terrors” planned for my next volume of plays. For the vestments, see note 16 above.

Play 8. *Bitches and Pussycats*, or, *Butting Heads, Peace of Ass*

1. Sodomy is also a theme of the *Farce of the Fart* (FF, 66–67); for an invaluable introduction to the cultural context of sodomy, see Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*; and, for that of menstruation, see McCracken, *Curse of Eve*.

2. This story was widely reported; see, e.g., the coverage by Philip Rucker for the *Washington Post*: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/08/07/trump-says-foxs-megyn-kelly-had-blood-coming-out-of-her-wherever/> (accessed 10 November 2015).

3. That's right: I'm old enough to remember that visual gag from the film *The Way We Were* (1973).

4. For a terrifically insightful survey of physical comedy, see Bevis, *Comedy*, chap. 2.

5. Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès provides much needed research on the social standing and material lives of the Basochiens in *Les Clercs* (esp. chap. 3).

6. This is a familiar plotline in farce in that characters often go to a great deal of trouble to have sex, but then the climax seems uncertain. Compare, e.g., with Kitty and Allcock in #2, *The Shithouse* or with Wilhelmina and Father John in *Cooch E. Whippet* (FF, #11, 355–57; 361–63). In fact, were Kitty more interested in her own husband in *The Shithouse*—both characters are unnamed in the original—one could *almost* think it's the same couple as Jude and Jean. Regardless, it's an in-joke.

7. Such mockery extends to men too in *Birdbrain* (FF, #12), just as it does more searingly to women Latin-language learners in *Chick Latin* (*Farce nouvelle des femmes qui apprennent à parler Latin*), RC, #17 and projected for a future volume of mine.

8. This technique also appears in Passion plays, as in the philological riff on mirroring (*mirer*, *remirer*, *miroir*) in Arnoul Gréban's fifteenth-century *Mystère de la Pas-*

sion (vv. 19948–63). Our play's doubling is a half-assed (double-assed?) version of such mirroring.

9. With its charming refrain of “you’re a cunt,” “The Diva Song” is part of Silverman’s HBO special, *We Are All Miracles*. At the time of publication, it had not yet appeared in a music registry; however, Silverman is affiliated with ASCAP, IPI #435250579. See her performance on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bZfzscQMjU> (accessed 12 April 2016).

10. As always, provided all permissions have been cleared, the mood could certainly be captured by transforming “Bad Boy”[©] into “Bad Girl,” adding “Show Me,”[©] “What’s New, Pussycat?,”[©] “What’d I Say,”[©] etc. The brazen might try the Silverman “Diva Song” (see note 9).

11. Rhyming octosyllabic couplets give way here to a decasyllabic pattern of ABBA-ABAB-ABBA-ABBA. I’ve proposed a bona fide musical interlude of song and dance in largely twelve-syllable verse. The striking features noted above (§ “Language”) are in roman type below.

Original Verses in Middle French (ATF, 1: 146–47; my emphasis)

LE PREMIER MARY

*Se je voulois recorder ta leçon,
Laissons la là: car c’est pis que des mors
Verset de deuil et respons par tenson.
Son bec d’aspic gette par marrisson
Son oeil sourdant, dont tous les jours suis mors,
Mors ay esté et je m’y suis a mors,
Mort souhaitant plus que joye et soulas.
Lassé en suis, car j’ay reçu le mors
Mordant en bouche, dont souvent dis hélas.*

LE SECOND MARY

De la mienne jamais je n’en fus las.

LE PREMIER MARY

Et la raison?

LE SECOND MARY

Tout mon plaisir accorde.

LE PREMIER MARY

*Corps de moy Dieu, tenu je suis ès latz
De la mère de haine et de discorde;
Oncques corde qui le larron encorde
Encores de l’an ne sera si diverse*

*Envers celui qu'elle estrangle ou encorde;
Recorde toy que ma femme est perverse.*

12. After the long decasyllabic interlude, rhyming octosyllabic couplets return (1: 147); so I return to prose.

13. Compare Jude's description to that of Marcel in #12, *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*, Scene 1.

14. If you prefer a different sensibility to the glorious tag line from *Seinfeld*, you might substitute "Master of the House."⁶

15. Given the philosophy that he expounds shortly, Jude might well be playing dumb here.

16. *A femme qui fait bonne chère / A son mary, gard le derrière* (1: 148). In the closing number, there is a variation on this theme about watching a woman's backside (1: 177–78).

17. *Que à battre la mauvaise gerbe / Se pert la peine du villain* (1: 150). Literally, this proverb means that only the vilest peasant would waste his time beating off bad grain from the chaff, as it were.

18. This is the key line of the play and by which it is best known: *Elle a le cul tendre* (1: 150).

19. If generationally appropriate, try, à la *Different Strokes*: "Whatchu talkin' 'bout, Jude?"

20. If you don't know Marcel Duchamp's takedown (1919) of the Mona Lisa: reading the letters aloud in French—"L-H-O-O-Q"—yields *elle a chaud au cul*, which means that she has the hots up her ass. Both the image and an explanation appear at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L.H.O.O.Q.> (accessed 4 December 2014).

21. *Considerez, mes amis tous* (1: 153) is hugely ambiguous: Lexie could be addressing the spectators as her good (perhaps exclusively male) friends *or* she could be referring to all her lovers *or* she could be addressing any and all such lovers who happen to be present *in the audience*.

22. Here, as later in the men's reprise of this wisdom, it's funnier if pantomime suggests the homonymy, as in "grin and *bare it*."

23. The son of *Monsieur la Haultivière* (1: 153) sports his aristocratic particle; he was probably some classy guy.

24. This would be a good spot at which to insert the place of performance, e.g., for me, Santa Barbara.

25. Another piece of proverbial wisdom here: *A femme de bien, ung fol homme, / Et à quelque meschante femme / Ung bon homme* (1: 154). Literally, it means "to a proper woman, a crazy man, and to some nasty lady, a good man."

26. She actually says something kitchen-Latinate: *Ec* (1: 154).

27. Here, of course, I'm channeling Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussycat," which could be made even more explicit with "What a beautiful Pussy you are, you are!"

What a beautiful Pussy you are!" The poem is easily accessible on the Internet at, e.g., <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/ns/pussy.html> (accessed 9 May 2014).

28. Technically, *mangé des chiens et des loups* (1: 156) means being eaten by dogs *and* wolves.

29. It's confusing in Middle French too; and Tissier agrees (*RF*, 1: 435n). Literally, *l'ante de la seur à mon frère* (1: 156) is "the aunt of my brother's sister" . . . who, um, would presumably be Jean's aunt too. Jean is, after all, her "brother's sister." Even if this is an error or an allusion to a half-brother, a step-brother, or a brother-in-law, it's awfully curious.

30. She says: *commère Aimé* (1: 156), which means either "beloved friend" or "good friend, Amy," possibly implying a scribal error that has transformed "Alix" into "Amy." This could be a wonderful moment for staging deliberately a phenomenon that only occurs accidentally: a Freudian slip (see *MBA*, 127–29). I suggest that the *actress* playing Jean utter the name of her "real-life" husband or, better yet, her "real-life" wife.

31. There are multiple translations of this famous line uttered by Molière's *Tartuffe* in act 5, sc. 4. This one is my own. For the French, see, e.g., <http://www.toutmoliere.net/IMG/pdf/tartuffe.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2016).

32. She might break into a chorus or two of Tom Lehrer's inimitable "Vatican Rag"® or even Nirvana's "Lithium."® The questionable receptacle for holy water gives rise to more and more blasphemous punning in the inimitable *Farce des Chambrières* (see above, #2, *The Shithouse*, note 6).

33. While "good old Saint Griboult" (1: 157) didn't make Di Stefano's list in "À Chaque Saint," he did make Merceron's *Dictionnaire des Saints* (898–99), albeit shrouded in mystery. I agree with Merceron that the name combines sexual innuendo with a large dose of foolishness, which makes sense coming from Jean. A limp patron saint of lunatics?

34. As noted above, when Lexie protests that no man other than her husband will touch her body (*Mais mon corps jà ne touchera / Qu'à mon mary* [1: 157]), she appears to accept his abuse.

35. *En lieu caché ou tapy. / Derrière un dressouer ou tapis . . .* (1: 160): a *dressouer* is a hutch, an armoire, or chifforobe. But the suggested *tapisserie*, the wall-hanging tapestry, gives new meaning to the enduring French expression, *faire tapisserie*, or "to be a wallflower."

36. If children are cast, one could redistribute Lexie's line, *Voicy nostre maistre* (1: 160) to the children as "Look! Daddy's home!" If Jean remains onstage to watch the mini-drama, one could even double the redistribution to include her saying: "Check it out folks, here's hubby!"

37. It's wine in the text (1: 161) but beer works better.

38. As noted above (§ "Language"), Jude's caustic commentaries are related to parts of the Mass, as here for the *Introitus* (1: 161).

39. I've doubled another doubled line about charming or *plaisantz acordz* (1: 163) because it strikes a nice musical *chord* with Jude's ongoing liturgical commentary.

40. This line (1: 164) is still attributed to Colin in the manuscript (*RBM*, B-iii); but, given Jude's constant *sotto voces* about the Mass, it makes more sense as Jude's running commentary.

41. *Mastine* (1: 164) is particularly vulgar; see also *RF*, 1: 449n.

42. Regarding this line, *Par bieu, tu t'en repentiras* (1: 164): in the *RBM* (B-iii), it is attributed to Colin, the First Husband. But I find it infinitely more logical—and more funny—as part of Jude's blow-by-blow: all the more so in that the original stage direction appears *after* Lexie gives “fair warning.” Unless . . . *everyone's* wrong, and this is *Lexie's* line after Colin has struck her. Nor would it be uncommon in farce for *her* to strike *him* (as in the *Edict of Noëe*, *FF*, 95–97; and *Getting Off on the Wrong Foot*, *FF*, 322).

43. *Je faictz cela que tu dois faire* (1: 165): another possible translation, which could be inserted above, is “If you did your job around here, I wouldn't have to do it for you!” Curiously, Viollet le Duc suggests that “*je*” should be “*tu*,” as in *Colin* is doing what he should. I think the *RBM* gets it right (B-iii).

44. Literally, too ugly to dance at a wedding, *dancer aux nopces* (1: 165).

45. *Mais, pour Dieu, regardés quel(le) perte / Ce seroit de ce gentils corps / Que de fièvre soit-il retors; / Aussi bien est-il mal fillé* (1: 167). Viollet le Duc attributes all four lines to Colin; but I find it more logical that Jude would continue his ongoing commentary along different lines. More interesting still: *Lexie* could say it. Thus, I've made room for all those possibilities; and here is yet another: if Jean is still onstage, *she* could chime in and repeat the line I've attributed to Jude.

46. She calls him *Jehan L'anguillé* (1: 167), which sounds like “Johnny Eel.” Eels were also part of medieval proverbial wisdom: slippery, but also “scared shitless” like the “Eel of Melun,” an actor who flinched onstage *before* the theatrical representation of his tortures began (see *DBD*, chap. 6.) Tissier knows the story too (*RF*, 1: 454n) but doubts its relevance to our play. I'm not sure: other pertinent eel proverbs listed by Oudin include “breaking an eel on your knee,” meaning “to undertake something when no good can come of it” (*Curiositez*, 14).

47. Again, Viollet le Duc attributes these lines to Colin (1: 167) but I find them much funnier in the mouth of Jude. Feel free to follow Viollet le Duc.

48. Marvelous wordplay of “to God” and “to the Devil” (1: 167–68) as Lexie responds to his adieu (*à Dieu*) with “go to hell” (*au diable*).

49. Here (1: 168–69), the men reprise the advice-giving structure of the women, notably their earlier allusions to “endurance” (e.g., 1: 153). With a different rhyme scheme, this is likely another musical number.

Original Verses in Middle French

LE PREMIER MARY

Conseille moy que je feray.

LE SECOND MARY

Endure.

LE PREMIER MARY

C'est bien duré;

Je mourray donc en endurant.

LE SECOND MARY

Puisque ta femme t'a tant duré,

Endure.

LE PREMIER MARY

C'est bien enduré.

Avant l'an maint hanhan duray [diray?]

LE SECOND MARY

Je diray c'est en endurant

Endure.

LE PREMIER MARY

C'est bien enduré.

Je mourray donc en endurant.

LE SECOND MARY

Sus, après, à ce demeurant. . . .

50. Compare, e.g., with the cabaret numbers of #9, *Wife Swap*, sc. 5.

51. *Mettez-la là* (1: 171): again, this sounds like singing.

52. This line is attributed to Jean (1: 171; *RBM*, C-i), but it's funnier as Colin's ex parte to the audience; so I've made room for both possibilities. Compare also to Scene 1 of #9, *Wife Swap* or Scene 2 of #10, *Husband Swap*.

53. Alternatively, since it was *baiser* (1: 170), it would be just as suggestive to have her say: "Am I finally gonna get my kiss?"

54. In both the *RBM* (C-ii) and Viollet le Duc's edition (1: 174), the stage direction reads that the "Second Husband" is speaking to "Jude." But Jude *is* the Second Husband so I've corrected accordingly. So did Tissier, *RF*, 1: 467. In the original, it's *parlant à Mathieu* (our "Jude").

55. In contradistinction to the premise of *Cooch E. Whippet* (*FE*, 333–36), there seems little fear that the Devil, when conjured, will actually show up.

56. In the final poetic set piece, the meter shifts to pentameter until the final four-verse envoi, which reprises rhyming octosyllabic couplets. Ideally, the verses would be sung to original music.

LE PREMIER MARY

*Qu'il vault trop mieulx femme de bonne chère,
Presupposé qu'elle preste en derrière
Secrettement, que femme à malle teste,
Ce néantmoins qu'el(le) soit chaste et honneste.
Pour vivre en paix, l'autre est plus singulière.*

LE SECOND MARY

*Ne me parlés jamais de femme fière;
Il vaudroit mieulx que homme fust en bière
Que d'en avoir.*

LE PREMIER MARY

*Il est tout manifeste.
Qu'il vaudroit mieulx femme de bonne chère,
Presupposé qu'el(le) preste son derrière,
Secrettement, que femme à malle teste.
La raison est: elle vous a la manière
De vous traicter: la peine n'est point chère;
Elle rit tousjours, chante ou faict feste
Mais de l'autre, qui pleure, puis tempeste
N'en parlez point.*

LE SECOND MARY

*Conclusion dernière:
Il vaudroit mieulx femme de bonne chère,
Presupposé qu'elle preste en derrière,
Secrettement, que femme à malle teste,
Ce néantmoins qu'el(le) soit chaste et honneste.
Pour vivre en paix, l'autre est plus singulière.

Avant que tirez plus arrière,
Ainsi comme il est de raison,
La petite chanson gorrière;
Ce faisant, adieu vous dison.*

57. One might try, e.g., “Bitch”⁶⁰ or “Riders on the Storm.”⁶¹

Play 9. *Wife Swap: A Musical Comedy*, or, *The Taming, Pas de Deux*

1. Recall that Master Mimin was placed inside the chicken coop of *Birdbrain* to be reeducated (FF, #12).

2. Faivre wondered the same thing in *Répertoire*, 400–401.
3. The gay couple scenario would require a great deal of interpolated action that is not implied by the text, however sparsely delineated, especially when it comes to the antipathy between Margie and Persephone. And yet, it's possible if, in accordance with medieval staging practice, male actors play the female characters. Plus, they're already in drag throughout the show!
4. Chaucer too fashioned a Proserpine in his *House of Fame*. On the Persephone motif, see also Radford, *Lost Girls*, esp. 24–26.
5. In Scene 1, Blotto asks Margie to fetch his friend for dinner (*RFMSJ*, 4: 10); so, logistically, it makes sense that Blotto's place is closer to the Good-Times Inn.
6. Petit de Julleville finds it “unfortunate” that the abundant songs are indicated by their first verses alone (*RTC*, 234); however, musicologically speaking, there is no reason to assume that a call-out is decipherable only by its first verses. Any given song might just as readily have been signaled by its refrain or by its most popular or tag line (above, “About This Translation,” § “Prose, Verse, Music, and Choreography”).
7. Both dances, along with many types of *branle*, were described in the sixteenth century by Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 81r–82r. Dance could be dangerous too, and violent: see my “Death by Dance,” chap. 4 of *MBA*.
8. For the text, see <http://www.hbo.com/real-time-with-bill-maher/episodes/12/329-episode/article/new-rules.html#/> (accessed 15 December 2014).
9. See, e.g., the translation in *Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. Klinck, 95–96; and, for a letter of remission to a bad actor in a gang rape of 1395, my “Spectacle of the Scaffolding.”
10. Sometimes, such a twenty-first-century venue as a night club or a cabaret has negotiated a standing license with a registry, a helpful thing for performers to ascertain.
11. Let the potential user beware and proceed with tremendous caution: the copyright history of this particular song is both complex and litigious worldwide. Multiple versions are registered with ASCAP and BMI; but the publishing rights are held by Larikin Music. The U.S. rights are administered by Music Sales Corporation (NY).
12. Compare this opening with that of the *Edict of Noée*, where an unnamed Wife is also spinning as she gets into it with another Cobbler (*FF*, 92–93).
13. Here begins one of many exchanges via song lyrics that, today, might be sung to original melodies. In *RFMSJ*, the lyrics are in quotes, as they are here. When I suggest postmedieval equivalents, they are flagged, as usual, by the copyright symbol.

Original Verses in Middle French (4: 3–4)

LE SAVATIER

“Quant j'estoys à marier
 Sy très jolie j'estoie.”
 Marguet!

MARGUET

Que vous plaist mon amy?

LE SAVATIER

*Aportés moy tost du fillé
Un bon carteron & demy.
Marguet!*

MARGUET

Que vous plaist mon amy?

LE SAVATIER

Du ligneuil n'ay pas a demy.

MARGUET

Atendés que j'en ai fillé.

LE SAVATIER

Marguet!

MARGUET

Que vous plaist mon amy?

LE SAVATIER

*Aportés moy tost du fillé
Un bon carteron et demy.
"Je l'ay bien aimée sept ans et demy."*

MARGUET

*A! vous n'estes pas endormy
Dieu mercy! je vous entens bien.*

14. Although *Faulte d'argent c'est douleur nompareille* is not in quotes at 4: 5 (*RLV*, fol. 408v), it's in pentameter in the midst of octosyllables. So I strongly suspect that the lament about a lack of money, money, money[®] is also a call-out to another song, or even to another bit of stage business from another *play*. For example, there is a character called *Faulte d'Argent*, whom I'm calling "No Dough" in my translation projected for a later anthology, and who appears in the *Farce nouvelle à cinq parsonnages, c'est assavoir: Faulte d'Argent, Bon Temps, et les Troys Gallans*, *RC*, #47, 379–83.

15. This is the pair of *mon mary* (husband) with *mary* (sorry) (4: 5), as noted above, § "Language."

16. The Middle French indeed reads *Ha! ha! ha!* (4: 6), the first of many onomatopoeic phrases (as noted above, § "Language").

17. Both Margie and Blotto say "*A!*" (4: 4–5), which might even indicate an orgasm. Compare this with a similar moment in *Blind Man's Buff* (*FF*, 177–78). But, given Blotto's

apparent disinterest in sex with his wife, actors will need to decide if a lot, a little, or zero sex play ensues.

18. *A! je veux que vous chantés / Un bien petit mot et demy* (4: 6) is the phrase (above, § “Plot”) that will appear in several incarnations throughout. Depending on the interpretation of “A!” it’s almost as if the song serves the function of a postcoital cigarette.

19. After Margie’s first sung octosyllabic verse, each couplet has three decasyllabic lines in A-B-A meter. Thus, I’ve opted for pentameter. Although my translation is literal enough, the language below gives a flavor of the musicality:

Original Middle French (4: 6)

MARGUET

*“J’ai un connin vestu de soye
Et est borde de velours tout entour.
C’est pour mygnons qui ont de la monnaye.”*

LE SAVATIER

*“J’ey un billard de quoy biller souloye
Mais mon billard est usé par le boult
C’est de trop souvent fraper en la roye.”*

20. This is the wonderful, musicologically rich pun based on *tacere* (above, § “Language”). *Garder bien le tacelet* (4: 7) calls for Margie quite literally to “give it a (musical) rest.”

21. *Si je ne change ma pensée* (4: 7). In Middle French, *si* could denote both “if” and “therefore” (as in *ainsi*), leaving doubt, as it were, as to the presence of doubt. Here, it offers a way of adding depth to Margie.

22. *Le branlle des amoureux* (4: 8), a “Lovers’ Two-Step,” is clearly rife with sexual connotations and dance moves.

23. In the original, here is the specific reference to the documented sixteenth-century French country dance, the *tribory de Bretagne* (4: 8).

24. It’s conceivable that this is the moment when the couple has sex . . . or has sex again. Alternatively, Margie might try—and fail—to seduce Blotto. It seems that women are on top only when men so demand. Either way, he zips up.

25. It would be possible to stage in mime Jacko leaving his *girlfriend*, Katarina. After all, there are plenty of unfaithful jackoffs.

26. Here, I play on at least three meanings of *je voys, je voys*, a phrase that Jacko repeats a few lines later (4: 11; 12): “I’m going,” “I’m coming,” “I get it.” This is another one of those moments in which the sparse dialogue results in ambiguity: Who sees—or hears—Blotto first? Persephone or Jacko? Either is funny but in different ways, and this line readily accommodates both. The former—more likely to my own eye and ear—involves Persephone madly insulting both men (with Jacko unsurprisingly slower on the uptake), whereas the latter implies a sotto voce exchange between the two men. The American use of “hello” as an exclamation

tion, a greeting, or a synonym for “Anybody home?” helps to convey all these meanings, as well as a third possibility that Persephone and Jacko hear Blotto’s call at the same time.

27. Persephone’s vociferous insults (4: 11) seem to apply to both her husband and Blotto, the latter coming into view at some point. This creates a certain ambiguity as to the target of her ire. Compare, e.g., to Johnno’s interactions with the Woodsman in Scene 3 of #5, *The Jackass Conjecture*.

28. At this point, it seems that an embarrassed Jacko has noticed Blotto; so this line is likely directed to Persephone. But it could also be directed to a noisy Blotto, to both, or even to an audience member who has screamed delight at Blotto’s entrance.

29. This odd speech, rife with obscenity, features not only the Middle French term for a “hoo-ha” (*bonhon*) but also an allusion to Saint Peter’s denying Jesus: *Va! vieille bonhon, vieille cyterne! / Va! vieille qui porta la lanterne / Quant Sainct Pierre renya Dieu / Me viens-tu maudire en ce lieu?* (4: 11–12). Moreover, lanterns appear in the context of another farcical dramatization of another proverb along the lines of “to believe any sort of nonsense”—as in to be stupid enough to believe that the poor man’s transparent animal bladder with a candle inside is a richer man’s lantern: i.e., *Les Femmes qui font accroire à leurs marys de vessies que ce sont lanternes*, #15 in the *Recueil Cohen*. Since it seems highly unlikely that Jacko has the nerve to stand up to his wife, perhaps he skulks off to deliver these vituperative lines as asides.

30. This is the possible product placement noted above (§ “Sets and Staging”). Any generationally appropriate lyric will do here to cue what is clearly a drinking song. Consider, e.g., “I Know a Place,”⁶ “99 Bottles of Beer,”⁷ a French version of the same (*et glou et glou et glou et glou et glou*), etc.

31. In the *RLV* (fol. 410v) and *RFMSJ* (4: 13), Margie says: *Quoy?* and Blotto says immediately thereafter: *Que voulez vous?* Plain old “What?” sounds rude for Margie (although maybe, since taken by surprise, she was *not* putting on an act.) So I’ve attributed the second line to both Margie *and* Blotto. It would also be logical for Blotto to continue his efforts to bolster his friend’s courage.

32. Another musical performance is possible. Consider, e.g., “Magic to Do”⁸ from *Pippin* and its charming invitation to “join us.”

33. If you’ve seen the marvelous restaurant scene from *Victor/Victoria*, picture the waiter who made the salad dressing “with the last of the rosé.”

34. From his earlier, flowery formality with Margie, Jacko switches immediately to *tu* at the bar (4: 14).

35. *Je le vueil* (4: 14), as noted above (§ “Language”), morphs readily here into the language of betting as “I’d love to” becomes “You’re on.”

36. Compare, e.g., to Dottie’s furious entrance in *Monk-ey Business* as she seeks her husband at the tavern (*FF*, 292–95). Remember too that Brother Pete of that play also proposes a swap.

37. *J’en suis maintenant amoureux* (4: 15): this is one of those troubling if typical medieval moments in which violent sexual desire is cast as love.

38. For French people of a certain generation, it was a standard of courtesy and *politesse* to enter a public space like a shop by greeting all those present with “Bonjour, Messieurs-Dames.”

39. It is possible that Persephone is flirting with Blotto (4: 16) to make her idiot husband jealous. But, since she has just cursed both of them out in the previous scene, I think it makes more sense that she sidle up to the Innkeeper.

40. Persephone utters the same *Je le veux* with which she will accept the swap a few lines later. Here too, it is inconsistent with Persephone’s character to be so accommodating to either Blotto or Jacko (4: 16); thus, I continue to direct her attentions toward the Innkeeper.

41. Alternatively, since he says *vous* (4: 16), he might well be speaking to Persephone: “So? Are we gonna do it? You know. . . .”

42. Much interpretation of her character is called for here: Is this delight or withering irony?

43. As noted above (§ “Sets and Staging”), a decision must be made as to where the wife-swap numbers take place. I’ve set them at the bar for the full cabaret ambience.

44. *Elle chante: Donne toy garde champion* (4: 19) appears in *RLV*, fol. 41rv. “She sings” is clearly a stage direction that logically follows “She dances” (*Elle danse* at fol. 409v). Le Roux de Lincy and Michel incorrectly wove into Blotto’s speech both the stage direction and Persephone’s brief four words of song. Thus, I have put her words back in her mouth and restored her actions.

45. For those keeping track, she has provided only five of the requisite seven farts.

46. In Middle French, the line is strangely literal but eminently musicological: “you know two-thirds more [*plus deux tiers*] than you did before” (4: 20). Remember that, in the medieval university, music and math were taught together in the quadrivium.

47. The synesthesia is in the original: laughter that is *seen* (4: 21).

48. There is another fabulous double entendre here that we have seen before and that recurs multiple times in this scene as each player except Jacko invokes both “sorry” and “married” (*marye*). But Persephone now purports to be joyful (4: 21) . . . unless she is being witheringly ironic. Logically, such joy could scarcely apply to being stuck with Jacko.

49. The ambiguity of Persephone’s words can be resolved through staging. On the surface, it seems likely that she is “reformed” enough to be addressing her husband, Jacko. However, it would also be possible to have her address Blotto as a form of ongoing rebellion.

50. Only after resolving the complexities of copyright could one consider the line “Merry merry king o’ the bush is he”⁶ from “Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree.”

51. This is where there begin the extreme ambiguities cited above (§ “Plot”) that infuse the subsequent dialogue (4: 22–23). Persephone states *Je suis a lui* (4: 23), literally: “I’m his” or “I belong to him.” But who is clinging to whom? I provide a rather large number of alternative readings below; and there will be many additional notes to indicate the precise nature of the ambiguities, readings, and misreadings (including some possible

instances of scribal error [see note 56]). But first, prior to the occasional line-by-line comparison with the original *RLV* text—and, as clarity demands—I reproduce the entire text that leads up to the envoi exactly as it appears in *RFMSJ*, followed by a literal translation. Here is the first part of the dialogue below:

Original Scene in Middle French (4: 22–23)

JAQUET

Et! compere que j'es ma femme!

LE SAVATIER

Vous ne l'aies pas!

PROSERPINE

Je suis à luy!

MARGUET

Il est vray.

PROSERPINE

Mon amy!

MARGUET

C'est son mary hay!

LE SAVATIER

Voyre moy.

PROSERPINE

Voyre luy!

JAQUET

Non est: par ma foy c'est moy.

MARGUET

C'est mon.

PROSERPINE

Et sy est vraiment.

JAQUET

Ouy moy.

LE SAVATIER

Mauldict soyt il qui en ment!

JAQUET

Qui? Mais vous.

LE SAVATIER

Adieu. . .

Literal Translation

JACKO

Hey, friend, I must have my wife!

BLOTTO

You will not have her!

PERSEPHONE

I'm his [i.e., I belong to him].

MARGIE

It's true.

PERSEPHONE

My dear.

MARGIE

That's *her* husband, hey!

BLOTTO

Yes, me.

PERSEPHONE

Yes, him.

JACKO

No way! My word, it's me!

MARGIE

He's mine [*or* "That's my opinion."]

PERSEPHONE

And, truly, that's how it is.

JACKO

Yes, me.

BLOTTO

May he who tells a lie about this be damned!

JACKO

Who? No, you!

BLOTTO

Adieu. . .

52. Here, I have visions of Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*: “He’s her husband, ain’t he?”

53. *C’est mon* (4: 23) can mean “This is my [husband],” i.e., “he’s mine”; or “that is my opinion.”

54. There are multiple ways to translate Persephone’s one line, *Et sy est vraiment* (4: 23), depending on whom we take to be the principal target of her sneer: “Ain’t no two ways about it!,” “Ain’t that the truth!,” “You’re welcome to him!,” or, indicating *Blotto*, “And I say that one’s *mine*!” or, *pushing Jacko toward Margie*, “Nope, *this* one’s yours now!” See also below, note 62.

55. With *Oui moy!* (4: 23)—which also looks and maybe sounds like *oui, mais* (“yes, but”)—Jacko has quickly switched from “No, *me*!” to “Yes, *me*!” So this suggests that there’s an error or an omission, that he’s confused, or any combination thereof. In my reading above, Jacko would be such a submissive that he’s fighting for his dominatrix, Persephone. But what I *really* think happened here is this: a line has been misattributed, and it belongs to Blotto, not Jacko. It makes sense that *Blotto* would grab Persephone and say, “Yes, *me*!” as in “Yes, she’s mine! And anyone who says otherwise is a damn liar!” Still, I’ve not reattributed the line inasmuch as maybe *I’m* the one who got confused rather than the copyist.

56. Thorniest of all are the first three lines (4: 23–24) of the speech attributed to Blotto (Le Savatier), after which he calls to Margie and she answers; so brace yourselves because this note is for medievalist geeks. The difficulty turns on the line *Jacquet je vous fery mary*. If this is indeed Blotto threatening vengeance (“Jacko, you’ll be sorry!”), then this would mean that, somehow, a skilled shrew tamer like Blotto has had the tables turned on him by a dolt like Jacko. True, the motif of the trickster tricked, the *trompeur trompé*, is much beloved by farce. But the triumph of Jacko seems far-fetched, even for farce. For my own part, I believe (as above, note 55) that a line has been misattributed or that some text might be missing. My suggestion has to do with the overdetermined nature of the dialogue, in which Jacko’s name is mentioned far too many times.

Original Scene in Middle French (4: 23–24)

LE SAVATIER

Adieu. Hay! Jacquet
Me payez vous de ce Jaquet (laquet [?]).
Jacquet je vous fery mary.
Hau! Marguet.

MARGUET

Qu’esse mon mary?

Literal Translation

BLOTTO

Hey, Jacko! You’re going to pay for this, Jacko! [*or* “Are you going to pay for this, Jacko?”] Jacko, I’m going to make you sorry for this. Yo! Margie!

MARGIE

What is it, my husband?

And here is what I think the original was meant to be, and which would better reflect the action of *RLV*, 412v–413r. In a word, I believe that, on one and possibly two occasions, the name of the character has been incorrectly woven into the line of dialogue. Remember too that we have already seen this phenomenon with a stage direction in this very play (fol. 409v, as corrected above, note 44).

LE SAVATIER

Adieu. Hay! Jacquet!

Me payez vous de ce . . .

JACQUET

Je vous feray mary.

[LE SAVATIER]

Hau! Marguet.

MARGUET

Qu'esse mon mary?

By the way, for these last two lines, a similar bleed of the character's name into the line (but doubled) might have occurred; i.e., Blotto simply shouts "Yo!" and Margie knows that he's talking to *her*.

In the scenario that I have just redrawn, we would have, more logically, the defeated wimpy "Jackoff" desperately shouting that Blotto will be sorry. This is a convention, moreover, of open-ended endings (like that of the *Pathelin*). In the interest of full disclosure, however: the problem with my misattribution theory is that the rhyme scheme doesn't quite support it. Then again, maybe it does, inasmuch as, during the disarray of the barroom brawl, the rhyme scheme itself has fallen into disarray. Since we are already dealing with variant endings, I've made room for a number of these possibilities.

57. Blotto's line reads: *Ma mye revient en avec moy*, to which Margie replies: *A! je le veuil bien par ma foy. / Mais faictes concluzion brefve* (4: 24). But does Blotto mean "My dear, come on home with me" (*Ma mye reviens-t-en avec moy!*)? Or is Blotto indeed telling Margie that his new sweetie, *Persephone* is coming home with *him* (*Ma mye revient en avec moy*). Any number of readings could make sense, but I find it credible that Blotto would issue a last zinger at Margie.

58. Again, there are other possibilities discussed above (§ "Plot") such as a ménage à trois or a gay marriage.

59. Alternatively, with greater agency for Blotto: "[*Blotto grabs Persephone again.*] That would be *me!*"

60. Alternatively, with greater agency for Persephone: "[*Persephone only pretends to capitulate.*] Right. That would be . . . [*reaching for Blotto and pushes Margie toward Jacko*] . . . *him!*"

61. Alternatively: “[*Margie indicates Blotto and heaves a huge sigh.*] And *that* one’s mine.” Or, she could fight for Blotto (but why would she?): “[*She indicates Blotto.*] And *this* one’s mine!”

62. Alternatively: “Well, look who finally caught on!” “No shit, Sherlock!” or, “Read him and weep.” See above, note 56.

63. Alternatively, Blotto could manage to taunt Jacko with a version of the line used above (note 57). Try this: When Blotto calls for Margie, she rushes right up to throw her arms around him, upon which he speaks to Jacko: “Check it out! This little sweetie pie’s comin’ on home with me.”

64. What he says is “Let her be given to me,” a grammatical structure that employs the subjunctive, as it does today. However, it’s spelled “C’on *me la baille*” (4: 24), which certainly sounds like *con* (cunt or asshole), as in “Let the asshole fork her over.”

65. While I’ve again opted for pentameter, I retain the original octosyllabic couplets of the final four lines of the envoi.

Closing Verses in Middle French (4: 24)

MARGUET

*A! je le veuil bien par ma foy.
Mais faictes concluzion briefue.*

LE SAVATIER

*Conclusion qui ne me grefue
Mais el me fait au coeur la feste.
Femme qui son mary tempeste
Qu’on ne la baille pas a Jacquet
Car envers ly fait trop la beste.
Femme qui son mary tempeste
C’on me la baille car sa teste
Amolyray et son quaquet.
Femme qui son mary tempeste
Qu’on ne la baille a Jacquet.
Jacquet veulx tu en ce lieu
Une chanson pour dire adieu?*

66. For obvious reasons—and depending on which ending is selected—one might consider “Bye-bye, Baby,”⁶⁶ “Cabaret,”⁶⁷ “Let’s Stay Together,”⁶⁸ or for an entirely different sensibility, “Who’s Sorry Now.”⁶⁹ However I can think of no more appropriate ending than “We Go Together”⁷⁰ from *Grease*, the lyrics of which fit the play to a tee in that, with song and dance, the couples “go together” as they “go [off] together.” Needless to say, all permissions must be cleared but, for a peek at what the scene looks like, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9IRZgo_fUA (accessed 12 November 2015).

Play 10. *Husband Swap*, or, *Swap Meat*

1. Etienne de Meaux's "Trop est mes maris jalos" is a wonderful example of the genre. As noted above (#2, *The Shithouse*, note 9), an easily accessible text and translation can be found in Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-songs*, 82–85. For more on the *mal mariée* (or *malmarriée*) with some examples of the repertoire, see, e.g., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, ed. and trans. Doss-Quinby et al., 41–42.

2. For an illuminating introduction to this vast and complicated subject, see Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West*, chap. 5. Though it lies beyond the scope of the present study, there is much rich scholarship devoted to the striking commonalities of theological and theatrical thinking in the Reformation. In *Staging Reform* (chap. 1), Huston Diehl brilliantly suggests, e.g., that the doctrine of Transubstantiation reprised—and was reprised by—the quintessential theological debate as to whether the transmutation of the sacred Host and wine into the body and blood of Christ was a literal, performative act (as for Catholics) or a symbolic one (as for Protestants). Inspired by Diehl's work, I discuss many of the theatrical ramifications of Transubstantiation in *Death by Drama*, chap. 12; see also Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body* and her *Signifying God*, esp. chap. 4.

3. I would propose a slightly different translation of *courage* (Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Demerson, 39): not quite Frame's "in courage" but, rather, "in temperament" or "in character" (*Complete Works*, 4).

4. This play was edited by Jonathan Beck (*Théâtre et propagande*, 179–203), and I shall discuss it at greater length in a subsequent anthology devoted to farces that are, shall we say, "holy terrors." For more on the distinctions (and lack thereof) between *farce*, *sotie*, and *moralité*, I review the impressive scholarship on the subject in *FF*, 7–16; 21–27.

5. Finding and ruling out loopholes is also the subject of another farce devoted to women seeking absolution from a female confessor (who ultimately refuses to grant it): the *Farce nouvelle excellentement bonne de quatre femmes* (#46 in the *Recueil Cohen*, 369–78), which is projected for a future anthology of mine.

6. Compare him, e.g., to Doc Double-Talk in *Playing Doctor* (*FF*, #6).

7. One of these is *Les Batars de Caulx* (*RLV*, #48); my translation, planned for another anthology, is entitled *Poor Bastards*.

8. For this celebrated bit that includes the Complaints person doing all the complaining, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQFKtI6gn9Y> (accessed 15 November 2015).

9. Numerous versions and arrangements of this folk song are listed on both ASCAP and BMI; so proceed with caution when requesting rights. One version may be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnjmYAHNqA_ (accessed 30 May 2014).

10. "Handy Man"® or "Gimme Some Lovin'"® would work well from either a male or female perspective.

11. At *RFMSJ*, 3: 3, there is a rhymed pair of two unusual words *dandrille* (the virile member), and *Vuandrille* or (Saint Wandrille playing a flute). On Wandrille, see Merce-

ron, *Dictionnaire*, 1151. Let's just say that, since I went with "girly man," the phallic flute stands in for the lack of a phallus. If you think my translation is a phallussy, tough nuts.

12. *Jenin qui de tout se mele* (3: 3) is a reference to any of the "John-Boy" farces featuring "Jenin," often an idiot or a moronic valet who appears, e.g., in *Le Badin qui se loue* (RBM, #11), my translation of which is projected for a future volume as *Good Help These Days*.

13. *L'aysné de Caulx* (3: 3) is a reference to the odious son Henry from *Poor Bastards* (see above, note 7); see also *RTC*, 251.

14. *Aleger leurs fantasies* (3: 4) already sends a mixed message in Middle French. *Aleger* ("to diminish") is used interchangeably with *esliger* ("to enhance"); but the two are virtual antonyms. Conveniently, this admixture can do double-duty for the two potential addressees of the whole speech—customers and spectators—so I've doubled the line. I cannot help but hear Mel Brooks's 2000 Year Old Man on the subject of "Bernie's" discovery of sex: "I think there's ladies here."

15. As noted in *FF* ("About This Translation," § "Repetition and Repetitiveness"), such repetition is a common feature of the *rondeau triolet*, often associated with, e.g., a character's entrances and exits (*FF*, 48).

16. Normally, *de bon esprit* (3: 5) captures a wide range of spiritual qualities like wit or a nice disposition. The latter likely does not apply.

17. *Lache amanché* (3: 7), as discussed above (§ "Language"), also appears in *Frère Guillebert*, my translation of which is projected for a future anthology as *Brother Dick*. See also Tissier, *RF*, 6: 222n.

18. Here is the first appearance of the refrain, *Y vous le fault donc trocher* (3: 7), which I've enhanced throughout with a rhymed lead-in.

19. In farce, the term *bragardes* (3: 8) often applies to women who cultivate an uppity appearance buttressed by the latest fashions; one such Bragarde, moreover, is a character in the *Farce nouvelle excellentement bonne de quatre femmes*, mentioned above (see note 5).

20. Here is the reference (3: 9) to the not especially attractive *buguenote*.

21. *Ma vie me fera abrégé* (3: 9) could be played very dark, as a veiled threat of suicide: i.e., her husband will make her shorten her life.

22. A *chosse de bonne liqueurs* (3: 10) is a sort of sac used to filter especially dense liqueurs.

23. Compare, e.g., with Margaret Cho's delectable "Stick it in!" bit from her stand-up special, *I'm the One That I Want* (2000).

24. *De volonté franchoysse* (3: 11) is likely a synonym for the sex act, as expertly practiced by the French, of course.

25. *Lache amanché* (see note 17) reappears (3: 11), now associated with moral and financial value.

26. Each individual specimen is described in the text (3: 12–14). In Middle French, they are: *un frisque, un sobre de bouche, un honneste & gaillard, un tout jolletru, un homme de guerre, un vertueulx, un musicien, un donneur d'ambades, un forgeur de salades, un*

serurier, un bonnetier, un drapier (perhaps an unappealing blatherer like Guillaume Jocaulme of the *Pathelin*), *un estaymier, un boulanger, un chausetier, un mason, and un charpentier*.

27. This is the *pestilleur de morisque* (3: 12) discussed above (§ “Plot”).

28. Two images come to mind: the “Shady Dame from Seville”[®] production number from *Victor/Victoria* (1982); and Colin Quinn’s bit from *Long Story Short* (2011) about a personified Australia whose balls are showing from under his shorts.

29. As above for the trade-in refrain, I’ve written a rhymed lead-in to enhance the musicality of the variations on *Par ma foy, y ne me duict point* (3: 12).

30. For this Germanic-looking specimen, there is a fitting reference to the *allemande*, a German dance, also described by Thoinot Arbeau in *Orchésographie*, 67r–68r; see also Hudson, *Allemande*.

31. What can I say? How else was I supposed to translate *le cul tout rompu* (3: 13)? For reasons unknown, his asshole appears to be all busted up and broken. Perhaps Charlotte heard or sniffed that one out before seeing whatever evidence is on display. One can only imagine.

32. By the way, for our “pretty boy” *jolletru* (3: 13), Godefroy gives only one example of the term, which he translates as *galant*, and it’s from our play. One of the best bits ever on the *Daily Show* involved the comedians’ “joy boner” in covering the story of Rick Perry’s infamous “oops.” Even Samantha Bee sported a phallus. See <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/vxwb69/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-indecision-2012---mercy-rule-edition---joy-boners> (accessed 23 April 2016). Since the horny Anna Nicole isn’t interested, maybe his demonstration made too much noise or there’s something wrong with the equipment.

33. The language is slightly ambiguous (3: 14) as to whether he is now also displaying a new specimen or backing up to include, and thus again arguing the merits of, the soldier boy.

34. For *de mestier* (3: 14), I expand the basic meaning—“of any use”—to make room for the literal sense of *mestier* as “profession.”

35. Even in the original, this is a veritable send-up of “Love and Marriage,”[®] so my translation is fairly literal.

Closing Verses in Middle French

Le TROCHEUR

*Je ne vous seroys rien trocher,
Je n’ay donc rien qui vous soyt propre;
Quelque marys que je vous offre,
Rien ne vous duict. Pour abréger,
Alés les autre lien changer,
On ne peult trocher mariage.*

La PREMIERE

*Il est certain, nous sommes d'âge
Que nous ne devons poinct changer;
Il est certain, pour abrégier.*

La DEUXIEME

*On ne doit croire un estranger,
Y n'amende poinct de changer.*

La TROISIEME

*Chascun se deust de nous railler,
Y n'amende poinct de changer.
En prenant congé de se lieu,
Une chanson pour dire adieu.*

36. I've corrected an orphaned rhyme: *Quelque marys que je vous offre, / Rien ne vous duict. Pour abrégier* (3: 14–15).

37. For obvious reasons, "Changes."[©]

Play 11. *Extreme Husband Makeover*, or, *Lost and Foundry*

1. It's a pair of scenes that would have been instantly recognizable to medieval readers of the delectable satire *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage* (8–15). That work opens with a wife simulating tears in bed in order to manipulate her husband into repeated entreaties that she disclose what's wrong.

2. Instant acquiescence might sound unrealistic; but remember Thaïs from Hrotsvitha's *Paphnutius*? She undergoes one of the speediest conversions on record. See, e.g., the Wilson translation in the *Plays of Hrotsvit*, 106–9.

3. The fountain of youth is the subject of *La Fontaine de Jouvence*, my translation of which is projected for a future anthology. For a description, see Faivre, *Répertoire*, #60, 168–69. And about the *Game of Thrones* reference: so shoot me. It's quite the Valyrian steel sword that's forged in the opening credits of the hugely popular HBO drama.

4. Rabelais uses the expression in *Pantagruel*, bk. 2, chap. 29; see also *Complete Works*, trans. Frame, 228, 835n; and Le Roux de Lincy, *Proverbes*, 1: 7.

5. In *The Student Who Failed His Priest Exam* (FF, 426n), we meet one Collart le Fèvre, an infamous cuckold whose paternity of his children is in doubt. In a fabulous intertext, he too is a blacksmith.

6. The cabbage patch itself is not without significance. It is the comical site of mistaken identity in the delicious fabliau known as "Estula." Unfortunately, Nathaniel Dubin didn't include "Estula" among his translated *Fabliaux*, but you can find a quick plot summary here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Portia1780/trot> (accessed 11 July 2014). Vegetable patches are even mentioned specifically in the *lex salica*, the legal code from the time of Clovis (and which code will assume even more relevance in our final play). For

some specific measures and their monetary penalties, see, e.g., Drew, *Laws of the Salian Franks*, 88–89.

7. A song about them entered popular culture: see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6r1baNdgImo> (accessed 7 June 2014).

8. Recall the scandal surrounding Michael Richards's racist rant against a heckler; footage is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoLPLsQbdto> (accessed 1 January 2015). See also Young, "Black Body."

9. For obvious reasons, anything by the Smiths would work well, as would the verse about having a bell from the "Hammer Song" ("If I Had a Hammer").⁶ One could also consider "I'm the Only One"⁷ or "Light My Fire"⁸ along with a great number of romantic songs featuring bells: "Bells Are Ringing,"⁹ "Till There Was You,"¹⁰ "If I Were a Bell"¹¹ (those last three relegated to female fantasizing); or, depending on the season—recall the Christmas cuckoo in #4, *For the Birds*—"Jingle Bells"¹² or "Silver Bells."¹³

10. Because of its unusual flavor, I reproduce below the opening versification. Instead of octosyllabic couplets, it features a rhyme scheme of A-B-A-B, which suggests some kind of song such as a *rondeau* (AbaAabAB), a dance, or a production number.

Original Verses in Middle French (1: 63–64)

THIBAUT

Hau! Jennette!

JENNETTE

Que voulez-vous?

THIBAUT

Sus! Aidez-moy à ma requeste!

Approchez-vous, mon fin cuer doulx.

Hau! Jennette!

JENNETTE

Que voulez-vous?

THIBAUT

J'ay une si horrible toux

Qu'elle me rompt toute la teste.

Hau! Jennette!

JENNETTE

Que voulez-vous?

THIBAUT

Sus! Aidez-moy à ma requeste!

[At this point, the standard, rhymed octosyllabic couplets begin.]

Je veulx me faire ung peu honneste.

Boutez-moy ma robbe à point.

11. The wordplay here (1: 64) is on *vieil lart* (old piece of bacon!) and *vieillard* (old man); see also a similar pun in #7, *Holy Deadlock*, note 32.

12. I believe that this line might well have done double duty, broadcasting Calvin's hearing loss and reprising a convention from, e.g., Passion plays, in which the audience is asked to settle down and shut up (*DBD*, chap. 8).

13. *Qu'estranglé soit cestuy des loups* (1: 64) refers literally to being strangled by wolves (cf. above, #2, *The Shithouse*, note 5). This line also works well if addressed to the audience.

14. Beginning at 1: 65, the recurring line is: *Il ne tient pas là*, which could also be rife with sexual connotations, as in—perhaps as asides to the audience with the appropriate gestures—"he can't stay in here" or "that thing's barely attached down there" or "he can barely hold on to his junk."

15. He refers to *femmes honnestes* (1: 65), who are engaged in the same "honest activity" (*chosse honneste*) on holidays as those in which Anna Nicole purports to be engaged in Scene 2 of #10, *Husband Swap* (*RFMSJ*, 3: 8). Unless it's drinking (#10, note 22).

16. Again, compare with Frigid Bridget, who was possibly obliged to help Dummy Downer wipe his ass in *Playing Doctor* (*FF*, 196–97).

17. Remember that another famous medieval character has a tendency to ignore desperate pleas that he appear, only to do so later when *not* called: none other than Merlin.

18. This is the phrase mentioned above (§ "Characters and Character Development"), and it is a common salvo in farcical disputes, as when Cooch complains of Wilhelmina's paltry dowry in *Cooch E. Whippet* (*FF*, 344). For Ebenezer, it's: *Je n'euz de vous, pour tout potaige / Que vingt livres en mariage / J'en eusse trouvé largement / Qui en eussent eu plus de (dix) cent* (1: 68; *RBM*, A-iii). For Tissier, however, the amounts in our play give pause (*RF*, 6: 138n). He speculates that, whoever produced the *Recueil du British Museum* was wont to exaggerate in that the "disproportion between twenty and one hundred *livres* is sufficient." Tissier believes that the *dix cent livres* of v. 108 and, later, the ten thousand remodeled men of v. 263 have both been multiplied tenfold. For myself, I see no reason not to retain the added, exaggerated craziness, whatever its origin.

19. If we go with Calvin being forty years old, this also serves as a bit of dramatic foreshadowing.

20. This is the exchange cited above (§ "Language") regarding one *écu* vs. two *ducats* (1: 75).

21. See above, note 18. This is where Tissier deems that, at v. 263, the figure of 1,000 is more plausible than 10,000 (*RF*, 6: 152n). Again, I retain the larger figure of the original (*RBM*, B-i).

22. Ebenezer guesses 100 *francs*, a far cry from the one *écu* that Penny expected—and even farther from what the Bell-Maker will propose. I've interpreted his line—*Je voudroye qu'il fut déjà fait / Allons-y* (1: 76)—as stoic resignation, but it could also be genuine enthusiasm: "I wish it were already done," as in "he can't wait."

23. *Il nous faudroit doncques refondre / D'une matière moult alluitée* (1: 77): For some philological insight, see Tissier, *RF*, 6: 154n; vv. 279–80. It is practical to tease out the meaning of this metallurgically oriented line during the negotiations with the Bell-Maker, which I do in Scene 8.

24. In *ATF*, 1: 77, there is a misattribution of speakers, which was also caught by Tissier (*RF*, 1: 155; vv. 289–94). I suspect that there has also been a misinterpretation of meaning. In *RBM*, B-ii, Thibault (our Calvin) suggests that they pay a visit to the Bell-Maker and asks what his friend thinks of the whole affair: *Compère, allons veoir ce maistre. / Que vous semble de ceste affaire?* After that, however, Calvin apparently poses a rhetorical question or wonders aloud: *Que sçay-je? S'il se pourroit faire / Oncques si bien ne nous advint; / De soixante ans tourner à vingt / Ce seroit un souverain bien. / Allons vers luy.* My hunch is that this exchange is more dialogic: i.e., that Ebenezer jumps in with his own take, venturing that it could do both men a world of good. Either way, it remains difficult to tell which man is dreaming of going from sixty to forty. I've distributed the lines in a slightly different way. As noted above (§ “Language”), the speaker and his inflection will serve to determine whether Calvin is bemoaning his own sixty years or suggesting—mockingly or ironically—that his friend needs it more than he.

25. At this point in the text (1: 78–80), and later too in Scene 8, there appear a number of verses of three to five poetic feet, some constituting orphaned rhymes. I suspect that these are short refrains from songs. Consider their content: “That I cannot do” (*Il est fort à faire* [78]); “One hundred *écus* each,” “Happy men are we,” and “No, no, not on your life!” (*Chacun cent écus; Nous sommes contens; Ha, rien! rien!* [79]); “Where do you hail from,” “From this town,” “Silly girl,” “Never you mind!” (*D'où estes-vous? De la ville; Quelle simplesse!*; and *Ne vous en chaille!* [80]). They seem to invite repetition and singing.

26. *Cinquante escus pour [chacun] homme / Ou je n'y mettray jà la main* (1: 79). The second part of the line could mean either “I don't touch *them*” or “I don't touch *you*.” One possible interpretation is that Smitty is trying his luck at bargaining with the ladies instead.

27. *N'attendez pas jusqu'à demain* (1: 79) is close enough to *n'attendez à demain* in Ronsard's famous “gather ye rosebuds”-type sonnet to invoke the *carpe diem* topos. For “Quand vous serez bien vieille” with various translations, see, e.g., http://www.bewilderingstories.com/issue177/Ronsard_Helene.html (accessed 20 June 2014).

28. Or, for a different sensibility, one could substitute: “Just in time for Christmas! Jingle bells! Jingle bells!”⁸⁰ or “Nip! Tuck! Nip! Tuck! Spruce 'em up! Spruce 'em up!”

29. The Middle French has specific proper names: “from here to Vaugirard” and Captain Jean Peullart (1: 80). Once could also insert more site-specific references.

30. He says: *A celle fin qu'à moy ne tienne* (1: 81), technically: let the ending not be blamed on me.

31. As noted above, the wordplay derives from the double meaning of *confondus* (1: 81): “confused” and “melted completely.” Whence my invocation of folklore for such a legendary moment, as in Jan Harold Brunvand's *Curses! Broiled Again*.

32. In my opinion, these highly lyrical four verses (1: 82), unusual for farce, are the most important of the entire play, so I've doubled them: *Et s'il y avait tant de matières / En les fondant d'un cœur joyeux / Que pour un homme en viennent deux / Quant l'ou-vraige dehors sera / Que dites-vous?*

33. Technically, the line reads from here to Senlis (1: 82), a city known for both its amphitheater and its capital cases adjudicated against such animals as pigs, the latter of which I've conveyed in Penny's subsequent line. And remember the "old bacon" (above, note 11)? For the trial of the black-snouted sow of Senlis, see Evans, *Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*, 160–61, 308–9; and my "Homicidal Pigs," 201–2, 215–16. The company might localize the play by adding the city of performance, as in, for me: "the most reckless women from here to Santa Barbara."

34. Here is the pun invoked above (§ "Language") regarding *ne m'en chault* or "I don't care" (1: 83), as in "it doesn't heat me up." Across the pond, we say "it leaves me cold," but the French do like to express things negatively. We say "It's hot outside"; they say "It's not cold."

35. Technically, it's "give her till Pentecost!" (1: 83), whence my Easter reference.

36. As much or as little of the haunting Poe poem might be recited here, ideally with plenty of mime to convey the wordplay on *sonner mot* (1: 83; above, § "Language"). See, e.g., the online version of "The Bells" at <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/medny/venturi-poebells.html> (accessed 13 June 2015.)

37. *Et cuidez-vous que la science / Se publie en si peu d'heure?* (1: 84). Technically, this line means something on the order of "Do you think scientific results are disseminated so quickly?" But I suspect that the verb for publication (*publier*) is a wink at picking up copies of the play available for purchase.

38. More wordplay here on one of the favorite verbs of farce, *contrefaire* (1: 84), i.e., "to imitate," "to feign," but also "to work against" or "to do the opposite."

39. *Il est trop cler* (1: 84) has at least two meanings: "that's clear" but also "he isn't browned enough." Under different circumstances, it could also mean that he looks too "priestly" or "student-like" (as in *clerc*, or "cleric").

40. Perhaps there is a flimflam quality to Jenny's offer of payment *en beaux ducats* (1: 84). For all we know, she implies gold but proposes silver, having picked up more negotiating savvy from her husband than she thought. Or than *we* thought.

41. With allusions to the humoral theory of medieval medicine, Penny desires a *sanguin* and not a *flegmatique*, whereas Jenny prefers a *colloरिक* over, we presume, a *melancholique* (1: 85). Since Penny is in fact already married to just such a *colloरिक* in *Collart*, this is also a playful reference to farcical husband swapping in a play with plenty of bile to go around.

42. Literally, *durcis en vieillesse* (1: 85) suggests a *hardening* that comes with age; but that would be the wrong pun for this play. If you wish to insist, you could say: "Hard as a rock. And not in a good way."

43. This is not the first time that we encounter a *nez camus* (a pug nose) in the farces; see above, #7, *Holy Deadlock*, note 50. Remember too that William of Orange lost a piece of his nose in battle, so he was often William of the “short nose.”

44. The new descriptors for Calvin are *hardy et bauss* and, for Ebenezer—with a bit of Gallic pride, *franc et gaillard* (1: 86).

45. There is some ambiguity here, *quelle surprise!*, about the earlier agreed-upon price. When Smitty offered “\$5K each. Two for the price o’ one,” that could be read as “Two for the price I was charging *originally* for one” (\$10K) *or* “Two for the price I *just gave* for one” (\$5K). My opinion is that this is likely another flimflam in that there is no explicit indication that Ebenezer also pays. Tissier thinks that the two men might be paying for one another (*RF*, 6: 172n); but I think it’s a scam in which Calvin gives Smitty fifty *écus* for the two of them (rather than *apiece*, as negotiated) (1: 87). Also, with two poetic feet missing, his line, *A vostre bon congié*, might well be another refrain.

46. At least, this is what she will soon report to Smitty in Scene 14 (1: 90).

47. Viollet le Duc puts *je vous requiers* in parentheses (1: 88); but there are no such parentheses in *RBM*, C-i. He likely did so in order to indicate there were four poetic feet too many here, i.e., the versification of the octosyllabic line is completed by the four feet of Calvin’s next line.

48. Verses 511–13 are missing from *ATF*, but Tissier restored them (*RF*, 6: 117; 174).

49. A change in rhyme scheme (1: 87–89) suggests a different performance sensibility, such as rap or vaudeville; thus, I’ve doubled this moment.

Original Verses in Middle French

THIBAUT

*Puis que m’avez voulu refondre
Et changer ma complexion,
Car je seray seigneur et maistre,
Or pensez bien de me remettre
Toutes les clefz de la maison.*

JENNETTE

Non feray.

THIBAUT

*Dictes-vous que non?
Ha, par la mort, si [le] feray.*

JENNETTE

Pour Dieu, mercy (je vous requiers).

THIBAUT

*Compte rendez
Du mien de tout le temps passé,*

*Et, se vous m'avez cabassé,
Jusque(s) à la valeur d'ung denier,
Vous le comperrez.*

COLLART

*Venez, damoyselle, rendre compte:
Car je veulx sçavoir combien monte
Mon ordinaire justement,
Jusque à ung denier.*

PERNETTE

*Et comment?
Nous vous avons faict refondre:
Je m'y oppose, quant à moi.*

COLLART

*Tais-toy; je monstrey de quoy,
Voicy vostre opposition.*

PERNETTE

Qu'esce à dire?

COLLART

*D'ung gros baston
Au millieu du dos bien assis.*

PERNETTE

Esse cela?

COLLART

*Voyre et bien pis.
Brief, vous passerez par là.*

50. A wayward decasyllabic couplet suggests something different, perhaps on the order of "If I Could Turn Back Time."⁶

51. Technically, she has one *beau ducat* left (1: 90).

52. I follow the changes in versification of the original. Although my doubled translations give a good sense of the literal meaning, it is worth reproducing the original.

Original Verses in Middle French (1: 92–93)

LE FONDEUR

*Passez vostre melencolye
Le plus doucement que pourrez.
Prenez patience et souffrez,
Puisque n'avez voulu rien croire,*

*Et tout cela considérez
Ne pensez plus au temps passé,
Mais à celui qui est advenir.*

JENNETTE

*Las! Que pourrons nous devenir?
Oncques n'eusmes douleur si grande.*

PERNETTE

*Autant nous vauldroit estre mortes
Que de languir en tel(le) destresse.*

JENNETTE

*Las nous ne serons plus maistresses.
Dea, bien je me ose vanter;
Plus n'aurons joye ne hyesses,
Mais douleurs grand(e)s et véhémentes.*

LE FONDEUR

*Dea ne soyez desplaisantes.
Les hommes ont telle puissance
Que tous leur rendent obéissance;
Gouverner doibvent par raison
Allez chascun en voz mayson,
Et laissez en paix ces mestiers.
Entre voz aultres mesnagiers
Maintenez-vous en vos esbatz
Pour éviter aultres perilz,
Et [bien] vous gardez haut et bas
De refondre voz bons marys.*

Play 12. *Marriage with a Grain of Salt*

1. The most complete and accurate record of the date and provenance of this play appears in Rousse. He identifies several errors attributable to the Frères Parfaict, which were then repeated by Madame Montaran, and, later, by Petit de Julleville (*RTC*, 149). Chief among those errors: the play could not have been published in 1558, which was almost twenty-five years before its publisher started doing business (*TFFMA*, 2: 551–52).

2. This Bibliothèque Nationale copy, RES-YE-2029, is also digitized at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86120540A>. The BNF has another copy: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Rés. 8-Z. Don-594 (577, 6, 4), also available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k72852b> (both accessed 5 August 2012). These two holdings seem identical in every way except the yellow vs. white color of the pages.

3. Recall that Bouhaïk-Gironès questions the very existence of the Enfants-sans-Souci (*Les Clercs*, 131–35).

4. Albeit with a limited focus on 1576–1620, Donald Perret also demonstrates such comic continuity in *Old Comedy*.

5. For additional, exquisite medieval images of medicine in manuscripts housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale, see *La Médecine au Moyen Age*, esp. those in Barthélemy l'Anglais, *Des propriétés des choses* (175) from the late thirteenth century.

6. Compare the woodcut on the title page of the *Discours facétieux* (see Figure 12) with the solemn theological nobility of the baptism of Clovis as performed by Saint Remigius (ca. 438–533), Bishop of Rheims, as in, e.g., the *Grandes Chroniques de France* (Castres, Bibliothèque Municipale, fol. 11), http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/jd/ft8k4008jd/figures/ft8k4008jd_00051.jpg (accessed 24 April 2016).

7. For more such imagery of bathing, see, e.g., <http://www.medievalists.net/2013/04/13/did-people-in-the-middle-ages-take-baths/> (accessed 21 March 2015).

8. For more on *volupté*, *bravade*, and *piaphe*, see below, note 12; compare also with the ambiguous vocabulary of love, sex, and rape in *Cooch E. Whippet*, *FF*, 335–38.

9. If you're curious, see Drew's invaluable English translation of the *Laws of the Salian Franks*. On marriage, e.g., and women's property rights, see 41–43; on financial penalties for touching freewomen, 84.

10. The same question arose for #10, *Wife Swap* (above, § “Sets and Staging”)—answer unclear—and in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover*, in which the couples clearly *do* go home for a time (Scenes 9 and 10).

11. For obvious reasons, such a song as “No Salt on Her Tail”[®] or “Sugar, Sugar”[®] could work well, as would many songs from the repertoire of the rock band The Cure.

12. Or, for a different sensibility, one might have him say: “Brown Sugar, you know she taste so good.”[®] When speaking of his alleged connubial bliss, Marcel uses the ambiguous terms, *piaphe*, *bravade*, and *volupté*. The term *piaphe*—yes, that's right, as in Edith Piaf, whence “La Vie en Rose”[®]—is one of many clues that helped Rousse to date this play (*TFFMA*, 2: 552; see also above, § “Character and Character Development”). Since Marcel also mentions *volupté*, Francophiles and French majors could have some fun by adding a quote or two from Baudelaire's famous “Invitation au Voyage” from the *Fleurs du Mal* (1857): *Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté / Luxe, calme et volupté*. See, e.g., the edition at <http://fleursdumal.org/poem/148> (accessed 15 June 2014).

13. There is another ambiguity in *O qu'à la mienne volonté / J'eusse plutôt pris telle femme*. . . . Here, Marcel is clearly regretting *something*; but, since *plutôt* or *plus tôt* could mean “rather,” “instead,” or “earlier,” his regret could indicate at least two things: he owes the wonderful idea to his parents; or he didn't marry sooner. If the latter, another possible reading of the line is: “I just wish I'd done it sooner.”

14. Ebenezer also invoked the *jeu d'amours* in #11, *Extreme Husband Makeover* (*ATF*, 1: 70). For Julian's song choice, one might substitute “Dat's Love.”[®]

15. Yeah, yeah, I know: the line is hijacked from *L.A. Confidential* (1997), but Marcel and Julian would indeed find adultery criminal.

16. The term, of course, is *contrefaire*. In this respect, Professor Pylon harks back to such sleazy forebears as Lucian of Samosata's "A Professor of Public Speaking," a character ever interested in appearances over realities (see, e.g., *ROMD*, 1–2; 110–28).

17. *Car par ce point l'on est tout seur / D'avoir force argent amassé*: the play on words is very clever in that *amassé* ("to amass" wealth) sounds like *à Macé* (as in "belonging to Macé," i.e., to Pylon himself).

18. Compare Pylon's pretentious use of Latin—*Et a vobis comperibus*—to that of Brother Peter in *Monk-ey Business* (*FF*, 286) and of the Professor in *Birdbrain* (*FF*, 383–88). If you don't recognize my use of the Latin declensions for the word "this" (*hic, haec, hoc*), no problem: neither would Pylon. But having him say something in Latin that sounds like "whore" or "harem" captures the *personnage*.

19. Literally: the gals will be *saines comme pommes pourries* or as "healthy as rotten apples."

20. Rousse finds these lines ambiguous; he thinks that Marcel and Julian might have offered money to the "doctor," which Pylon disingenuously refuses at first, only to pocket it in the end (*TFFMA*, 2: 562n). Regardless of who indicates gesturally to whom that money should change hands—the *man*-ipulation is rejected by Gilly and Françoise.

21. Compare, e.g., with Colin's similar rationale regarding Jude's wife in Scene 1 of #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*.

22. Somehow Rousse thinks that this is a question: *Elles passent donc beaucoup d'autres / Qui ont la teste diabolique?* (*TFFMA*, 2: 563); I don't. If expressed interrogatively, it would mean something on the order of: "You mean, worse than all those hot-heads, always flying off the handle?"

23. Here is where we find the intriguing allusion to *frans* with *sallés*, discussed above (§ "Language"): *Voilà dix frans / Sallés (suivant votre maniere)*.

24. The verb *besogner* appears frequently in farce as a synonym for the labors of sex (or sex work?).

25. This is the site of the wordplay on *saler, saaaaaa-ler, and salir* (see § "Language").

26. Interestingly enough, we find this meaning of SALT driving some of the pun-erile shenanigans of the *Urban Dictionary*: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=SALTS&defid=2016766> (accessed 15 June 2014).

27. This is the key speech discussed above (§ "Plot") in which dramaturgy and staging will determine whether the women literally salt themselves.

28. The tone here can be likened to Whoopi Goldberg's "bless you," à la "fuck you" at the end of *Sister Act* (1992).

29. Or, if Françoise directs this line not to Professor Pylon but to Gilly after they have stormed out: "We'll never set foot in *that* place again!"

30. This line constitutes a reprise of sorts of Julian's earlier wish that the women be salted "front and back" (*devant & derrière*). Now, it's *dos & ventre* ("back and chest") as the women gain the upper hand, as it were.

31. The better to convey the new rhyme scheme, I double this moment. Compare also its choreography to the closing violence of *Playing Doctor*, *FF*, 216–18.

Original Middle French of Beating Scene (Rousse, vv. 24–59)

FRANÇOISE

Ça, Jullien!
Par mes coups reconnaissez bien
Si je suis bien sallé ainsi!

JULLIEN

Ma femme, faites moy mercy,
Jamais folle [sallé] ne vous feray.

GILLETTE

Marceau, vous en aurez aussi.

MARCEAU

Ma femme, faites moy mercy.

FRANCOISE

Ha! les vilains, ils ont vessi,
Mais de mes coups les armeray.

JULLIEN

Ma femme, faites moy mercy,
Jamais saller ne vos feray.

FRANCOISE

Encor ces coups leur donneray
Pour les faire plus murmurer.

GILLETTE

Faisons les crier & plorer.
Ils ont eu fort beau passe-temps.

32. Julian calls him a Triacleur, the subject of another fabulous farce projected for a later anthology of mine: the *Farce nouvelle tres bonne et fort joyeuse à troys personnages d'un Pardonneur, d'un Triacleur et d'une Tavernière* (RBM, #26), in which another snake-oil salesman (the *triacleur*) goes up against a Chaucerian-style Pardoner.

33. *En sa maison n'ozon s aller*, as cited above (§ "Plot").

34. Once again, there is a change of rhyme scheme, here dominated by assonance, to (a)ABA-AAB-ABB. The rhyming octosyllabic couplets return for the final envoi (below).

Original Middle French (Rousse, vv. 287–96)

JULLIEN

En sa maison n'ozon s aller.

MAISTRE MACÉ

*Les douces je sçay bien saller
Mais, touchant de désaller, point.*

JULLIEN

Le diable vous en fit mesler.

MAISTRE MACÉ

Les douces je sçay bien saller

MARCEAU

*Mais dictes nous à bref parler
Demourons-nous donc en ce point?*

MAISTRE MACÉ

*Les douces je sçay bien saller
Mais, touchant de désaller, point.*

JULLIEN

Nous voici donc en piteux point.

35. The send-off was just too good not to provide a verse version as well. Compare also the phrase *il nous faut endurer* with the refrain from #8, *Bitches and Pussycats*, Scene 2.

Original Middle French of final rhyming couplets (Rousse, 297–306)

JULLIEN

*Or bien, il nous faut endurer
Sans aucunement murmurer:
Ainsi quiconque ne se contente
D'une femme douce & plaisante
Qui faict un honneste devoir
Merite (comme avez peu veoir)
D'en avoir une fort facheuse,
Mal plaisante, & et mal gracieuse,
Et vous en vueille souvenir
A Dieu jusques au revenir.*

36. Such a number as “Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves”[®] could work, especially if the two women morph parodically into Saline Dion. (You guessed: I owe that one to Michael Gnat too.)

Appendix

1. For the 43-page ruling in *Rupa Marya, et al., Plaintiffs, v. Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., et al.*, Defendants, see <http://www.shadesofgraylaw.com/media/00065570.pdf> (accessed 26 April 2016).

2. As in Latin, Middle French made no terminological distinction between speaking, singing, and chanting (*dicere/cantare; chanter/dire*). The premier works on this subject remain Treitler and Jonsson, “Medieval Music and Language”; and Treitler, “Oral, Written, and Literate Process.”

3. See, e.g., Mandel’s translation in *FCMF*, 131–36. I shall be providing a new translation of the *Pathelin* in a future volume.

4. This song, part of Silverman’s HBO special *We Are All Miracles*, does not yet appear in a music registry. Silverman, however, is affiliated with ASCAP, IPI #435250579. Or you can watch her performance here on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bZfzscQMjU> (accessed 12 April 2016).

5. A large variety of arrangements are listed on both ASCAP and BMI; so proceed with caution when requesting rights. One version may be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnjmYAHNqA> (accessed 30 May 2014).

6. As detailed above in #9, *Wife Swap*, note 11, let the potential user beware and proceed with tremendous caution: the copyright history of this particular song is both complex and litigious worldwide. Multiple versions are registered with ASCAP and BMI; but the publishing rights are held by Larrikin Music. The U.S. rights are administered by Music Sales Corporation (NY).

7. This particular song, words and music by Moustaki, was covered on *Le Météque*, released in 1969 by Polydor Records. It does not appear to be registered; but four dozen of Moustaki’s other songs are registered with ASCAP, and another ten at BMI under the artist’s ID, IPI# 21673700.

8. Again, let the potential user beware and proceed with tremendous caution: the copyright history of this particular song is both complex and litigious worldwide.

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